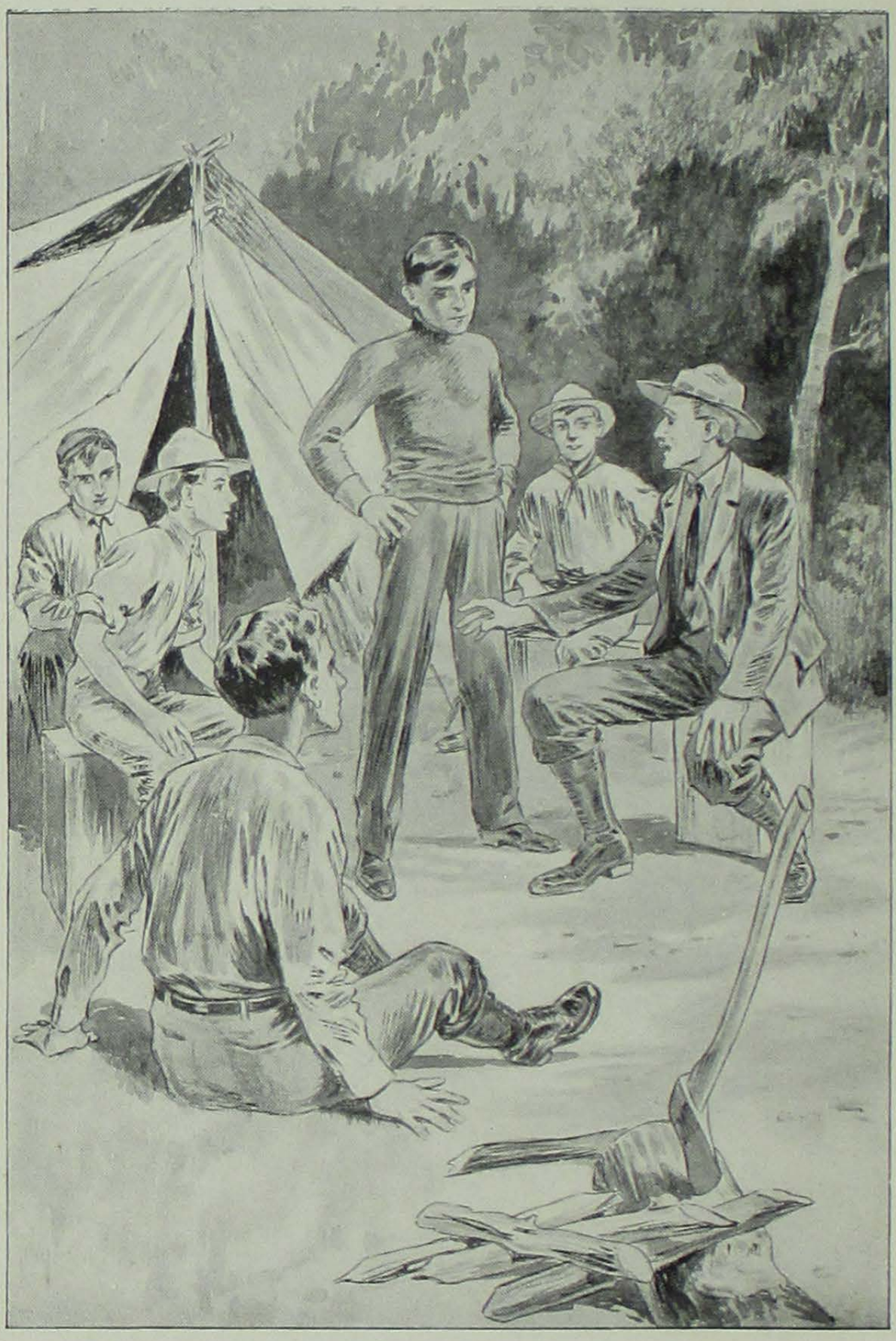
Oakdale Boys In Camp

MORGAN SCOTT



"THE LEGEND OF LOVER'S LEAP." "YOU SEEM INCLINED TO TAKE EVERYTHING TOO LITERALLY," SAID GRANGER.
—Page 132

OAKDALE BOYS IN CAMP

BY

MORGAN SCOTT

AUTHOR OF "BEN STONE AT OAKDALE," "BOYS OF OAKDALE ACADEMY," "RIVAL PITCHERS OF OAKDALE," ETC.

WITH FOUR ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARTIN LEWIS

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Oakdale Boys in Camp

CHAPTER I.

THE CAMPING PARTY.

The afternoon of a lazy midsummer day was waning as an old white horse drew a heavily loaded, creaking, complaining farm wagon along a crude, seldom used road which wound through the depths of a silent stretch of timberland. A sleepy looking, tow-headed boy with round apple cheeks sat on the wagon-seat and held the reins. Behind the wagon five more boys straggled along on foot, stumbling over the rocks and "cradle knolls." The party, with the exception of the drowsy driver, who had been engaged to transport the camping outfit from Pemstock, the nearest railroad station, was bound for Phantom Lake, the objective point of the expedition.

As originally planned, the company had been

made up of four Oakdale lads, Phil Springer, Sile Crane, Ben Stone and Rodney Grant; but, listening to their talk of the sport they would have on such an outing, Sleuth Piper had become inspired by a longing to join them, and almost at the last moment he had succeeded in securing permission of his parents. The five mile jaunt from Pemstock to Phantom Lake followed a journey of twenty odd miles by rail; but, despite the dust, heat and bad roads, the enthusiasm of the boys showed no symptoms of waning.

Carrying a double barreled shotgun and wearing an old leather-banded cowboy hat and a belt supporting a sheathed hunting knife, Piper followed close behind the writhing wagon, peering with an exaggerated air of caution and keenness into the timber and bushes on either hand. The rustling of a running chipmunk, the distant chatter of a red squirrel, or the cawing of a crow, lazily wheeling overhead, was sufficient to cause Piper to halt with quickly uplifted hand and the pose of one who sensed an impending danger.

"Oh, what's the matter with yeou naow?" drawled Sile Crane in exasperation, as he finally

stumbled against Sleuth's heels. "Yeou couldn't shoot anything if yeou saw it, and, anyhaow, the old gun ain't loaded."

"Hush!" sibilated Sleuth. "We're in the enemy's country, and peril menaces us on every hand. Who knows that the chatter of yonder squirrel or the sudden cry of the soaring crow does not betoken the near presence of some prowling varmint? There may be bloodthirsty redskins lying in ambush for us, and, unless we preserve extreme caution, perchance our scalps to-night will dangle in the wigwams of the Wampanoags."

"Oh, go on with yeour dinged fol-de-rol," snorted Crane. "Yeou've read so many of them cheap Injun stories that yeou're half nutty. Between them yarns and the detective stuff yeou sop up, yeou'll go clean off yeour base if yeou don't look aout. Come, pudge along." He ended by giving Sleuth a vigorous shove that nearly sent the smaller lad sprawling.

"Careful, Sile," begged Ben Stone. "Have you forgotten that it was Sleuthy's clever work which practically saved me from the stigma of a

crime? If you have, I haven't, and I'm not liable to forget it."

Piper gave his champion, a stocky, square built, somewhat unprepossessing lad, a grateful look.

"I guess I opened their eyes some that time, didn't I, Ben?" he grinned proudly. "I made the fellers that had been poking fun at me sit up and take notice. I had them all spellbound in court when I told my story and gave my deductions."

"Yes," chuckled Phil Springer, who was wearing a canvas suit that crinkled and rustled at every step. "It was so still in the court room that you might have heard a gum-drop."

"A pun that's right worthy of Chipper Cooper himself," observed Rodney Grant, who, although a genuine Texan and the son of a cattleman, was the most simply and practically dressed member of the party. "We must be getting near the lake. It's sure a wonder to me that the Dutchman hasn't rolled off the wagon-seat before this and broken his neck. Look at him! There he goes! Oh, Dutchy, look out!"

The sleepy driver seemed to awaken and recover barely in time to prevent himself from bounding like a ball beneath the forward wheels of the wagon.

"Vat's der matter?" he gurgled, yanking at the reins and turning to glare, red-faced, over his shoulder. "Vy iss it you at me yell like dot undt nearly make me off fall? Who vas you calling Tutchman already now? I vould haff you understood dot I peen a Cherman."

His indignation brought a shout of laughter from the boys.

"Pardon me for breaking in on your peaceful slumbers," entreated the Texan. "We were reckoning the lake must be right near by this time."

The German lad rubbed his eyes, yawned, and looked around.

"Yah," he said, "der lake hass almost reached us. It vill soon be here, I peliefe. Not much more must we on go."

"We'll never reach the lul-lul-lake in the world if you gug-gug-get twisted in gug-guiding as much as you do in tut-talking," said Springer.

"Vot iss?" cried the young German in derision. "Anyvay, I do not up chop my vurds, der vay you did. Ven dose vurds did out come your mouth from, it iss mincemeats they vas already."

This turned the laugh on Springer, who sought in vain to make a sufficiently sarcastic retort, and became so excited through the effort that he stammered more than usual.

"Oh, start up your old nag again, Dutch," urged Crane. "Yeou and Springer both murder language in a criminal fashion."

"Maype dot peen so," admitted the lad on the wagon; "but it iss py our mouths we talk, undt not our noses through." With which solid shot he chirruped to the old horse, and the wagon creaked onward once more.

"It sure seems to me," laughed Grant, "that Mr. Carl Duckelstein isn't near as sleepy as he looks. As we've engaged him to bring us butter, eggs and milk daily, he may provide some amusement for us."

In a few moments, the road taking a bend through the trees, they set the woods ringing with shouts of satisfaction, for before them they

caught a glimpse of the placid blue waters of Phantom Lake. Soon the broad sweep of the sheltered island-dotted lake, with a range of mountainous hills rising directly from the shore at the further side, opened out before them, the prospect being one to make their youthful hearts beat swiftly.

Eight miles in length and fully half as far across at its widest point, the forest-surrounded, mountain-sentineled strip of water was one of the most picturesque sheets to be found in old New England, remaining as yet unspoiled by too many swarming campers and resorters, although a newly opened hotel near the base of the highest and most precipitous cliff of the range of hills was attracting increasing numbers of the latter class. From Pleasant Point, which the Oakdale boys had now reached, the hotel far across the lake could be glimpsed amid the green foliage at the base of the purple cliff.

Springer capered like a colt, shouting again in joyous abandon as he ran out on the point to get a good view of his surroundings.

"It's gug-great, fellows," he cried—"simply

great! This is a corking place to camp. Why, here's deep water on one side right off the rocks, and a cove with a sandy beach on the other sus-side. Gee whiz! it's fine."

The enthusiasm of the others, excepting, of course, the seemingly stolid German lad, was scarcely less unrestrained.

"It certain is all right," was the decision of Rod Grant. "I'll admit it beats anything to be found in Rogers County, Texas."

"Here's a rippin' place to go in swimmin' right off the rocks," announced Crane, inspecting one side of the point. "Looks like a feller can dive off into ten foot of water. By glory! we sartain ought to have fun here."

"Come over here," called Stone from the other side. "Come on over, fellows. Here's a place where we can land with our canoe when we get it over from Pemstock."

With one foot crossed over the other, Sleuth Piper leaned on the muzzle of the shot-gun, in imitation of the pictured pose of some scout or trapper he had seen on the cover of such a lurid

yarn as pleased his fancy, calmly surveying the prospect from the most sightly spot of the point.

"We should not forget," he said, "that we're in the heart of the Dark and Bloody Ground, afar from the nearest settlement. What seems so peaceful and serene to the naked eye may hide a thousand deadly dangers. Though the pizen redskin may not be near, through these trackless wilds prowl innumerable ferocious beasts that—"

"Wake up," cried Crane. "Turn over; yeou're on yeour back."

"Let's get busy," suggested Stone. "There'll be plenty of time to look around tomorrow, and we've got to hustle to pitch that tent and get supper before dark."

"Sure," agreed Grant. "Everybody get busy. Come on."

CHAPTER II.

MAKING CAMP.

Carl, the German boy, was dozing again upon the wagon-seat. When they awoke him he grumbled a little, but they did not ask him to assist in unloading, knowing that he would simply be in the way. It required only a few minutes to remove the boxes, bales and bundles, which were piled together promiscuously.

"Is there a spring near by, Carl?" asked Grant.

"Vot does a spring vant uf you?" returned the German lad in surprise.

"We must have water to drink."

"Vater? Goot cracious! Didt you oxpect to up drink der whole lake right avay soon?"

"Not exactly, but we weren't right sure it was suitable for drinking purposes. It's all right, is it?"

"Vale, it vas vet, undt uf you drink it I don't peliefe it vill disagreement by you. Howefer, uf

it didt not like you, there vas a spring in der voods pack somevhere. I could not say how near it vas avay."

"Well," laughed Rod, "although that's plenty indefinite, I reckon we can find it. You'll come early in the morning with the butter, eggs and milk, will you?"

"Yah, der putter, eggs undt milks vill pring me early," assured Carl.

"And then you are to hike to Pemstock and tote our canoe in to us."

"'Hike' and 'tote' didt not understood me," replied Carl; "but I vill go undt dot canoe get to-morrow as soon as possibility."

"That's what I mean," said Grant.

As the German boy gathered up the reins to back the wagon round, Piper stepped forward and checked him with an uplifted hand.

"Stay," said Sleuth. "Pause a moment. Would you inform us if there are any dangerous wild beasts in this virgin forest? Are there likely to be animals prowling about against whose attack we should keep a nocturnal vigil?"

"Vot vas dot, a dog?" asked Carl wonderingly.

"Didt you mean vas you to keep a dog to out vatch for vild animals? I didt not observation dot you had a dog aroundt anyvhere. Maype, howefer, you have vun your pocket in."

Sleuth shook his head sadly. "It's evident," he returned, "that you are not wise to the delicate shadings of the English language. By a nocturnal vigil I mean a night watch."

"Oh, yah," nodded Carl. "Now I understooded it. You haf a night vatch your pocket in, in order dot der time can see you ven it iss dark. I peliefe maype it vas a goot kindt uf a vatch to have."

"You haven't answered my interrogation concerning the before-mentioned dangerous wild animals," persisted Piper, unheeding the half suppressed merriment of his companions. "Are there any around these parts?"

"Last vinter," was the answer, "my oldt man he didt see der feetprints uf a gouger, undt dot gouger didt off carry vun uf our sheeps."

"A gouger?" cried Sleuth. "What is that?"

"It vas a gouger; a vild peast mit four feets

undt claws undt two eyes undt teeth undt a goot appetite for meat undt plood."

"A-a-ah!" breathed Sleuth, with a long, shuddering intake of his breath. "I knew there must be such ferocious creatures in this wild and desolate wilderness, but what a gouger can be has got me guessing."

"Perhaps," suggested Grant, "he means a cougar."

"Dot peen vot I said already," persisted the German boy. "Vale, I must along go uf I vill home get pefore dark. Goot py, undt don't let dot gouger catch you."

Turning with some difficulty, he drove away into the stilly woods, the bumping and creaking of the old wagon drifting back to the ears of the campers a long time after it had disappeared from view. Ere those sounds fully died out Piper brought forth his jack-knife, hastily cut open one of the burlap-covered bundles, and extracted a hatchet, with which he attacked one of the smaller wooden boxes.

"Here, what are yeou tryin' ter do?" cried

Crane. "Don't go ter stavin' up that box; we may need it. What be yeou after?"

"The ammunition—the cartridges for the gun," palpitated Piper. "As a means of defense against a ravenous cougar, the weapon is practically null and void unless loaded."

Stone seized the hatchet and wrested it from the hand of the agitated youth. "When we're ready to open that box," he said, "we'll do so without smashing it into kindling, for we're going to need it again when we pack up. Have some sense, Sleuth. There are no cougars in these parts."

"Nun-never heard of one," said Springer. "There might be woodchucks or hedgehogs, or even, sometimes, a wildcat; but I'll bub-bub-bet noboby ever saw a cougar around here."

"Nevertheless," declared Sleuth grimly, "I intend to stand on guard tonight with this loaded weapon. Many a foolish, reckless man has lost his life by carelessness in the wild regions of an unknown land."

"As fur as I'm consarned," said Crane, "yeou can stand on guard if yeou want to; but when

it comes time to turn in, you'll see me hittin' the blanket."

"The first thing to be done," said Grant, who seemed to be the natural leader of the party, "is to pitch our tent and prepare for supper. Let's choose a camping spot. I reckon it won't be hard to find a good one here."

"What's the mum-matter with this place right where we are?" asked Springer. "It's all cleared up excepting a few rocks, and it's pretty near level."

"I judge we can find a better place," was the opinion of the Texan. "This is too far back on the point; we should get out where we can feel more of the breeze, which will help to drive away flies and winged insects. Furthermore, this is in a slight hollow that would get mighty wet if it rained hard. We must look out for drainage in case of rain. I think I can see a good place."

The spot he chose needed to be cleared of some low bushes and a few small loose rocks that were not difficult to remove. By using that location, as Rod explained, not only would they get the benefit of whatever breeze might be stirring and

have dry ground beneath them if it rained, but the tent could be so pitched that the early morning sun would shine full upon the front of it, and some near-by trees would provide cool shelter throughout the warm middle hours of the day. Furthermore, two low, flat-topped rocks, at a distance of some fifteen feet from where the tent would stand, formed a sort of triangle, which, partly closed in with some more stones that might be found near by, could readily be made, with the aid of the sheet-iron top they had brought, into a combined cook-stove and fireplace. Four or five feet from the rocks grew three stout saplings, likewise in a triangle and close enough together so that, by nailing cross-pieces to them and spanning those cross-pieces with boards from one of the boxes, a handy cook's table might be constructed in a few minutes.

The boys listened to Rodney with increasing respect for his judgment and sound horse sense.

"Gall dinged if yeou don't seem to know jest haow to do these things, Texas," drawled Crane. "I guess we'll foller yeour lead."

"All right," nodded Grant briskly. "Do you know how to rustle firewood?"

"I was brung up on a farm, and I cal'late I know as much abaout the different kinds of wood as anybody here."

"Then get the axe out of that bundle Piper cut open and go foraging for wood. Stone, can you cook any at all?"

"Not much," confessed Ben; "but I suppose I can fry bacon, and that's about all the cooking there'll be to do tonight."

"That's right. We've bread and some canned stuff. You can get out the stove top and cooking utensils and build the fireplace, with the help of Piper, who will bring such extra stones as you may need. Springer, I reckon you and I had better clear away here, unpack the tent and get it ready for pitching. When we need the others we can call them to give us a helping hand."

In this manner he set them all at work, and, to their credit, every fellow took hold with a will. While Springer and Grant were ripping up the small bushes by the roots, removing the loose stones and smoothing out the ground for the tent

floor, Piper, red-faced and grunting, brought rocks for Stone to build the fireplace, and, that being done, aided him in constructing the cook's table. The ring of Crane's axe resounded through the near-by woods, and presently he appeared with a huge armful of dry sugar maple cut from a fallen tree.

"If this ain't as good firewood as anybody can find araound here," he said, dropping it on the ground near the fireplace, "I'll eat every stick of it."

"Where's the axe?" questioned Grant.

"I left her stickin' in the log."

"Get it. Cut a chopping block if you can find anything suitable, and bring it along with the axe, which we'll need when we come to drive the stakes for pitching the tent. I don't reckon it's a good plan to leave an axe out in the woods away from camp."

Two minutes later the strokes of the axe were again ringing through the woods, and in less than quarter of an hour Crane reappeared with the implement in his hand, rolling along the ground

before him a chopping block, which he had cut from the small sugar maple.

By this time the fireplace was constructed and a fire already started in it. Furthermore, the cook's table was almost ready for use. The tent had been unpacked, shaken out and spread on the ground with the ridgepole lying in position beneath it. At each end of the tent lay the uprights, ready to be raised into position. The axe and the smaller hatchet were placed handy for use at either end of the tent, after which the tent fly was spread in its proper place, with the loops of the long guys over the front and rear pole pins. Stout stakes had been driven at both ends of the tent, and to these the guy ropes were made fast. The loops at the four corners of the tent were likewise made fast to stakes, the pins of the uprights were slipped through the ridgepole ends, and Grant announced that everything was ready for the raising.

It is probable that the fellow who has never pitched a tent in the woods will not understand the thrill of that moment which was experienced by the young campers as, directed by Grant, they

placed themselves in position to hoist away. As only four were required for this part of the work, Piper stood back and awaited orders. The others, two at each end, grasped the front and rear uprights and lifted the ridgepole, bearing the tent and fly. As soon as convenient, two of the boys slipped inside and seized the poles to assist, after which the uprights were hoisted into a vertical position. Those within remained holding them thus until the four corners were carried out and made fast to the ground pins. After this, the tent being thus temporarily secured, all went about the work of setting the guy pins and making the ropes fast to them.

The wall pins were next driven into place and the walls roped down to them. Then the fly was lifted to a proper height and guyed off, Piper keeping busy assisting to make everything staunch and taut.

"There she is, fellows," said Grant proudly, stepping away and running his fingers through his damp hair, "and it sure is my opinion that for a bunch of novices we've made a right good job of it. She stands as square and true as anybody

could ask, and I opine she'll provide shelter as long as we want it, in any kind of weather."

"You bub-bet," exulted Springer. "Don't it look fine? It's a dandy, fellows."

"The teepee is erected," said Piper.

"What be we goin' to call our camp?" asked Crane.

"Let's call it Camp Oakdale," suggested Stone.

"That's it; that's the name," cried the others.

"A cheer, then, for Camp Oakdale," proposed Grant.

They responded right lustily.

CHAPTER III.

EVENING AT PLEASANT POINT.

From the cooking kit the sheet-iron stove top, having two holes with covers, was brought forth and placed over the fire, each end resting on the edges of the flat-topped rocks. In this manner the cook stove was made ready for use, and while Stone fried bacon, made coffee, opened a tin of meat and carried forward all the preparations for supper, the others unpacked and stowed away the rest of the outfit.

The ground-cloth was smoothly spread over the levelled tent floor and made fast, after which, having decided on the positions of the beds, everything to be kept beneath the tent was brought inside and placed as conveniently as possible in the most limited space close to one of the tent walls. Of course there was some discussion over the stowing of these articles, but in the end it was Grant who decided how it should be done.

And it was the Texan who selected two tall, straight young trees, each about six inches in diameter, standing some distance from the tent, and instructed Crane to cut them down and trim them smoothly, that they might be used as "bed rails." Before these rails could be fully prepared, however, Stone called them to supper.

"Ay-yi!" responded Crane, instantly dropping the axe. "Yeou bet that saounds good ter me. I've ketched a few whiffs of that sizzling bacon, and it's made me so ravenous I could eat an old bootleg. Seems to me I never was so nigh famished in all my life."

The others were no less hungry, and they lost little time in seating themselves, cross-legged, upon the ground about a box cover which Stone had brought into use as a temporary table top.

"We can put up a regular dining table tomorrow," said Ben; "but this will have to do tonight." He was pouring the coffee as he spoke. "No milk, but plenty of sugar. Here's the fried bacon, the canned meat, and toast—burned a little, perhaps—and cheese. Not much of a meal, but it will have to do for the first one in camp.

To-morrow we'll have fresh eggs and butter and milk and——"

"Fish," put in Piper; "all kinds of 'em, right out of the water. Wait till I get my fishing gear together and start out after the finny denizens of this landlocked deep."

"I'll bet you're a great fuf-fuf-fisherman, Sleuth," grinned Springer, winking slyly at Grant. "You know all about it, don't you?"

"As a general all-round Nimrod," replied Piper, forking a piece of bacon and depositing it on a slice of the blackened toast, "I'm simply a wonder. The fish don't have a ghost of a chance when I get after them."

"Hush!" cautioned Grant. "Speak low. There may be some fish near this point, and, if they should hear you and carry the news of your presence to their relatives and friends, it might produce a tremendous panic among the 'finny denizens of this landlocked deep;' and we don't want to scare them all away."

"I don't know much abaout fishin'," mumbled Crane, his mouth full of food, "so I guess I'll git yeou to give me some lessons, Sleuth."

"Piper," said Stone, seating himself after pouring the coffee, "must indeed be a past master in woodcraft, hunting and fishing. He's the only fellow who has brought a sleeping bag. I say, Sleuth, where did you get that thing?"

"Borrowed it of Jim Bailey, who outfitted to go to the Klondike ten years ago and never went," answered Piper. "Oh, you fellows can have your beds, but I propose to do this thing up in style; and, while you're tossing restlessly on boughs and blankets, I'll be snugly ensconced in my cozy sleeping bag. They are great things when you're camping out; Bailey said so."

Chattering and bantering in this manner, the boys thoroughly enjoyed the meal, their faces lighted by the soft, warm rays of the sun, that was on the verge of sinking behind the wooded range at the far side of the lake. Already the white hotel could barely be discerned, and the purplish shadows were creeping out from the base of the hills. The lake lay like a mirror, with no breath of air rippling its glassy surface. The peace of evening in the solitudes was closing in.

"Let's hustle up a bit, fellows," urged Grant.

"We must cut some boughs for our beds before it gets too dark. If we can only get some genuine balsam boughs, it will be right fine."

"There's some balsam trees back beyond where I cut the firewood," announced Crane; "but now that I've et I feel so lazy I don't care much abaout cuttin' boughs. What's the use to trouble aourselves to-night; we've got blankets to roll up in."

"The blankets are all right," returned Rodney; "but anyone who tries to sleep in them with no boughs beneath him is sure going to find it uncomfortable before morning. The ground itself gets mighty hard, as I know from experience, and a chap who has been working and perspiring will feel plenty cold before morning comes, no matter how warm and easy he is when he first rolls in. I propose to have some boughs under me."

"With my sleeping bag," said Sleuth, "I need nothing of the sort."

"Then," said Rod, "you can gather up the dishes and wash them while the rest of us are cutting boughs. Everyone must do something."

Dish washing being especially abhorrent to him, Piper groaned and grumbled, although he did not refuse to perform the task to which he had been assigned. The others, provided with the axe, hatchet and strong knives, set forth, Grant leading the way, in search of the necessary boughs. Not far from the tent, in a little open spot, Sile paused a moment to kick off the top of an ants' nest and watch the frantic creatures which were exposed to view in that manner.

"To-morrer," he said, "if we've got it to spare, I'll turn some kerosene over this 'ere colony, and that'll fix 'em. We don't want any of them things crawling into the tent to nip us at night. I tell yeou they can bite some."

"They must be almost as dangerous as Carl's 'gouger,'" laughed Rodney; "but we can't fool with them now."

Crane had really located some trees of balsam fir, and, with the shadows deepening, they made haste to cut several huge armfuls, which they carried back and piled in front of the tent. This accomplished, the bed rails were cut off at the proper length and smoothly trimmed of

branches and knots, after which they were placed lengthwise in the tent, one being rolled up close against the wall, while the other, each end protruding from beneath the canvas so that it could be pinned fast to the ground, was laid parallel about four feet away. The space between those logs was then filled with the boughs, all carefully spread out, the softest tips being reserved for the top. It was necessary to light the lantern that they might see to spread the blankets, but finally the beds were arranged to their entire satisfaction.

Sleuth, having finished his task with the dishes, removed the stove top and replenished the fire, reclined in the light of the blaze and with a superior air watched his laboring comrades, secure in the belief that his sleeping bag would provide luxury and comfort denied the others.

Grant had brought along a guitar, an instrument presented to him by a cowboy on his father's ranch, and this he now produced and put in tune, seated on the chopping block near the fire. The rest found comfortable positions near at hand, and, having strummed a while, Rod struck into

"The Spanish Cavalier." He had a clear, melodious voice, and he carried the air, the others joining, with the exception of Piper, who could not sing a note to save his life.

"The Spanish cavalier stood in his retreat,
And on his guitar played a tune, dear;
The music so sweet he oft would repeat——
The blessings of my country and you, dear.
Oh, say, darling, say, when I'm far away,
Sometimes you may think of me, dear;
The bright sunny day will soon fade away,
Remember what I say and be true, dear."

The hushed and breathless trees seemed to be listening. The melody of the song floated far over the shrouded bosom of the lake, beyond which the light of the hotel gleamed at the foot of the cliff, on the highest crest of which a great white cross had been planted. The waving firelight flooded over the boys, seated or half reclining upon the ground, with the tent standing out snowy white against the black background of the forest. There was no moon, and overhead a few vapory stars peered through the haze which had

spread across the sky. At times the fire, rising, flung a gilded gleam out upon the placid water off Pleasant Point.

The glamor and poetry of the time and place was distinctly felt by all those boys. It was a splendid thing to be alive and to be there, a little band of congenial friends and comrades granted the ever-to-be-remembered delights of this mid-summer outing in the best days of enthusiastic, unsatiated, golden youth. In years to come, when the hard, cutting edges of life's experiences and cares had rasped away their fervor and left them, perhaps, incapable of deep enjoyment of simple things, they would sometimes recall this outing with the mingled thrills of regret and pleasure which memory so often yields.

They sang other old-fashioned songs: "Swanee River," "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party," "Bring Back My Bonny to Me;" and then, alone, strumming the accompaniment on the guitar, Grant rendered that doleful pastoral of the plains, "The Cowboy's Lament."

The mood for singing passed, and they were silent, even the Texan, having put aside his in-

strument, leaned his elbows on his knees and propped his chin with his hands to stare moodily into the sinking fire. As the unreplenished flames died down, the shadows crept nearer and the tent seemed to beckon to the embrace of its shelter.

Finally Piper shook himself, sat up, stretched his arms above his head and yawned.

"Me to the sleeping bag," he said. "I'm going to turn in."

CHAPTER IV.

A BAD NIGHT FOR PIPER.

"Why, Sleuthy," drawled Crane, in pretended surprise, "I thought yeou was goin' to stand guard all night to keep off bloodthirsty redskins and 'gougers,' or other wild animals. Is it possible yeou're goin' to let us snooze unprotected—is it possible?"

"Huh!" grunted Piper. "I guess there's no danger, and I'm mighty tired. There won't anything touch us."

"Then," laughed Grant, rousing from his reverie and picking up the guitar, "you no longer fear that tomorrow may see our scalps dangling in the wigwams of the Wampanoags?"

"The progress of civilization," returned Sleuth, "the irresistable advance of the ruthless pale-faces, has driven the red men steadily toward the setting sun, and I have a conviction that not many Wampanoags remain in this region."

"But," said Springer, rising to his feet, "it might be a good thing for somebody to kuk-kuk-keep guard. The rest of us would sleep better. Why don't you do it, Pipe?"

"Why don't *you?*" snapped Sleuth. "You needn't think you're going to throw everything on to me."

"P'r'aps he's afraid of the spook that's said to prowl around this lake," suggested Crane mischievously. "Yeou know folks claim the old lake is haunted by the ghost of a hermit that used to live on Spirit Island, and lots of people have heard the ha'nt wailin' in the night."

"Bosh!" sneered Sleuth. "Nobody believes such stuff these days. There ain't any ghosts." Despite this assertion, his eyes were seen to roll a bit nervously toward the near-by shadows.

"P'r'aps not," admitted Sile; "but sometimes some folks see and hear mighty peculiar things that they can't explain."

"Well, I'm not going to stay up all night watching for spooks," retorted Piper; "and, as far as wild animals are concerned, I'll slip a couple of shells into the gun and keep it right

near me, and if anything comes prowling round I'll fill it full of lead. I'm a light sleeper, anyhow, and it'll be easy for me to wake up."

Stone had relighted the lantern and hung it in the tent, that they might see to undress and retire. Grant threw a few more sticks on the coals and followed Ben into the camp, Piper at his heels.

While Sleuth was loading the gun and getting out the sleeping bag Crane, struck by a sudden mischievous idea, whispered eagerly to Springer, who clapped a hand over his mouth to suppress a giggle.

"Git him away from the tent, Phil—git him away somehaow," urged Crane; "and keep him till you hear me whistlin'."

A few moments later Phil shouted from the water's edge far out at the extremity of the point:

"Ho, Sleuth! Come on out here! Sleuth! I say, Sleuth, hurry up!"

"Hey, what's the matter?" Piper called back from the tent door. "Where are you?"

"Out here on the pup-point; out close to the

water. There's something jumping in the water, and I think it must be fish. You know all about fish, so cuc-come out and tell me if I'm right."

Piper hesitated and grumbled, but the others urged him to go.

"We want to know if there's fish araound here," said Crane, "for if there is mebbe we can ketch a mess for breakfast. Go on aout, Sleuth, and see."

His vanity thus appealed to, Piper issued forth, crossed the patch of light made by the reawakened fire and disappeared beyond, calling to Springer. Barely had Sleuth disappeared when Crane hastily found a lard pail in which various articles had been brought along, dumped the contents, warned the wondering Grant and Stone to keep still, and passed round to the rear of the tent, as the sound of his footsteps betokened. It was not long ere he was back, bringing the pail with the cover securely in place.

"Git holt of the mouth of that sleepin' bag, you fellers," he hissed. "Hurry up, before Sleuthy returns."

"What are you up to, anyhow?" questioned Stone cautiously.

"Never yeou mind. Don't waste time askin' questions naow. There's going to be something doing after Piper crawls into this old bag."

They held the mouth open for him, and, removing the cover from the pail, he dumped its contents inside the sack, chuckling all the while.

"What the dickens——" began Stone.

"A good big dip right aout of the middle of that ants' nest," snickered Sile. "Them little black bugs can nip like sin, and they'll have Sleuthy squirmin' some in no time. Shake 'em daown to the bottom—that's right. Naow spread it aout jest as he left it. Don't give it away to him, but jest wait for the circus to commence after he pokes himself away into that thing."

He began undressing, whistling at the same time, and soon Piper and Springer were heard returning from the point, engaged in an argument as to whether or not they had seen fish "breaking" in the water.

"Never mind," said Grant, as they entered; "I reckon we'll find out in the morning whether or

not there are fish around here. Hustle up, everybody, and turn in. I'm all ready, and don't fancy having you gents fussing and growling and keeping me awake."

Ere Piper had undressed to his underclothes, which were of the athletic variety and in which he proposed to sleep, all save Crane had wrapped themselves in blankets and rolled on to the bed of balsam boughs, the fragrance of which pervaded the entire tent.

"Git in, Sleuth, so I can put aout the light," urged Sile. "Got yeour old gun all ready, ain't ye? Be sure to keep off cougars, and don't let anything git into the tent to bite ye in the night."

Piper somewhat laboriously and bungingly stowed himself into the bag feet first, Crane snickering in spite of himself as he watched the performance, while more than one of the blanket-wrapped bodies on the boughs quivered suspiciously.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Sleuth resentfully, as he pulled the top of the bag up around his shoulders. "Perhaps you think this isn't comfortable, but I want you to understand

it is. I'll get more real good solid satisfaction out of this bag tonight than you will on your old bough bed."

"I was jest thinkin'," returned Crane, "that it might be kind of hot inside that thing this time of year. When I git too hot in the night it sets me to scratchin' something awful—makes me itch, like things was bitin' me."

"You'd better have your bed examined," sneered Sleuth pointedly. "I'm never troubled that way."

"Haow do you hitch this thing up raound yeour neck?" asked Sile, examining the top of the bag. "I should think yeou'd want it fastened, so yeour shoulders wouldn't stick aout. I see haow it's done, but it must be consarned awkward to fasten it from the inside. I'll do it for ye."

In spite of Sleuth's protest that he did not want the top fastened too tightly, the joker slyly drew it close and made it secure. This done, he lost little time in folding his blanket round him, extinguishing the light and rolling on to the boughs, where, like the others, he eagerly awaited developments.

Save for the mournful peeping of a tree-toad in a near-by thicket and the occasional crackling of the fire, the light of which flickered on the tent and shone through the narrow opening in front, a profound silence settled for a time over the camp. It was not long, however, before the waiting boys heard Piper moving a bit restlessly in the bag, and in a short time the sound of these movements became more distinct, seeming to indicate that Sleuth was squirming about uneasily. Springer turned a snicker into a poor imitation of a snore, and Crane poked him sharply in the ribs. Almost immediately Piper was heard scratching himself vigorously.

"Drat it!" he whispered to himself; and Springer's body shook convulsively.

Following this, the boy in the bag began jumping and twisting about, and several smothered slaps were heard.

"Hey, what's the matter with yeou, Sleuthy?" mumbled Crane in a pretended tone of sleepiness. "Why don't yeou keep still? Haow do yeou s'pose anybody is goin' to sleep with yeou kickin'

up all that rumpus? Ain't yeour old sleepin' bag comfortable?"

"Sure, it is," answered Piper; "only there was a hubble under me like a stone. Gee whiz! I didn't know it was so hot tonight."

"Dud-dud-dry up!" growled Springer. "If you keep talking you'll gug-get me wide awake, and I'll never go to sleep. Lie still, Sleuth."

"I'm comfortable now," assured Piper. "It's all right."

But barely had he uttered these words when he gave a tremendous jerk and resumed his scratching more vigorously than ever.

"Guess you were right, Sile," he finally admitted; "these sleeping bags are hot things. Don't know what makes me itch so. Oh, gee! feels like something was nipping me."

"Will you never keep still, Sleuth?" exclaimed Grant.

"I'm sorry," said Piper, struggling to sit up; "but something is stinging me like a lot of nettles. Oh, great smoke! it's fierce. Say, Sile, won't you unfasten this old bag? I can't seem to get out of the thing."

"No, I won't unfasten it," returned Crane in pretended exasperation; "but if yeou don't lay daown and keep still I'll hit yeou with a boot or something."

"I can't lie down," protested Sleuth, rapidly becoming frantic. "I tell you something is chewing me up to beat the band. I can feel things crawling on me."

"It must be all imagination," put in Stone, who, although he enjoyed the joke, really pitied the victim. "Still, imagination is very painful sometimes. Why don't you let him out of the bag, Sile?"

"Let him aout of the bag!" snapped Crane, rising on his elbow. Well, I guess not! Didn't he tell us haow comfortable them things was? He wouldn't lift a hand to cut boughs for a bed."

Piper groaned. "But I washed the dishes," he almost wailed. "Say, unhook me, Sile, and let me out, or I'll have a fit. I tell you there's things crawling all over me, and they're just chewing me up alive."

"You don't suppose they're 'gougers,' do you?" snickered Springer.

"Oh, laugh—confound you, laugh!" snarled Sleuth furiously. "You think it's a joke, don't you?"

"Sort of sus-seems that way to me," admitted Phil.

"Oh, say!" wailed the miserable fellow in the sleeping bag. "If I don't get out of this thing I'll go crazy. I tell you I'm being eaten up alive by something."

"Did you ever read a certain essay on the 'Power of Imagination,' Piper?" asked Stone. "If you ever have, you should realize that a person may make himself very miserable by conceiving all sorts of foolish things."

"No, I've never read your old essay," howled Sleuth, thrashing around in the bag. "But I tell you this is no imagination; this is the real thing Light the lantern, somebody, for the love of Mike! I'm burning up. I'm all afire."

"But there ain't no fire in the bag—there can't be," asserted Crane relentlessly. "Just the same, somebody ought to git a bucket of water and souse him. P'r'aps that would keep him still."

Springer could hold himself in check no longer,

and he burst into shrieks of laughter, during which Piper, kicking and floundering, rolled over and over until he was outside the tent.

At this point Stone sprang up and hastened out to bend over the writhing victim, and the others, eager to see all there was to be seen, also rose and peered forth.

It was with no small difficulty that Ben prevailed on Sleuth to keep quiet long enough for the mouth of the bag to be unfastened. When this was done, the boy inside scrambled forth, fiercely kicking the thing from him, and by the light of the fire he discovered a number of black ants running wildly about upon his person.

"There they are!" he cried. "There's what bit me! I told you something was doing it. Oh, murder! let me get out of my underclothes."

Frantically he stripped off every rag and stood stark naked in the firelight, still brushing and slapping and scratching.

"Well, I swan to man!" said Crane, who had also come out of the tent. "If them ain't ants, I'm a woodchuck. Haow do you s'pose they got into the bag?"

"Must have been there a long tut-time," said Springer. "Seems to me I've heard that one of the troubles with sleeping bags was that they made fuf-fine nests for ants and all sorts of insects. You'll never gug-get me to sleep in one."

"You never will me—again," vowed Piper. "Being eaten alive by ants is worse than being burned to the stake by redskins."

He was savagely shaking his underclothes as he spoke, having turned the garments inside out.

Stone carried the sleeping bag some distance from the camp and flung it over the low limb of a tree, and the boys urged Piper to make sure there were no ants remaining upon his person or his underclothes before he re-entered the tent.

"There are two extra blankets," said Grant. "You can have them, Sleuth, and make yourself comfortable as possible. We'll light the lantern and look around to make sure there are no ants left in here."

Apparently none had escaped from the bag, and after a time Sleuth was permitted to return and settle down with the blankets beside the bed of boughs occupied by his companions. The lantern

was again extinguished, and finally, one by one, the boys dropped off to sleep, although the occasional chuckling of Springer was heard even after some of the others were breathing regularly and heavily.

Gradually Piper's wounds ceased to smart, and, with no suspicion of the fact that he had been the victim of a rather painful joke, he sought to compose himself for slumber. Nevertheless, the experience through which he had passed made it no easy matter for him to get to sleep, and he lay there, turning now and then as the minutes slipped away into hours and the hours lengthened. At times the odor of the balsam boughs mingled with the faint smell of smoke which a fitful breath of rising wind brought into the tent from the smoldering coals of the fire. The tree-toad continued its mournful peeping, and away in the woods a bird awoke and chirped. Once something fell from a tree, making a swishing sound as it cut through the leaves and struck the ground with a soft thud.

Although he no longer suffered much from the attack of the ants, Piper found his every sense

painfully alert. Through the opening at the front of the tent he could see the faint, dull glow of the coals, which grew dimmer until it finally faded completely. At irregular intervals the night seemed to breathe with puffs of air which set the leaves rustling as if they were whispering to one another. Off in the woods something stirred, and there was the barely perceptible cracking of a twig, as if it had been broken beneath a soft and stealthy foot.

Imagination was vigorously at work with Piper, and he fancied all sorts of creatures to be prowling about in the vicinity. He was vexed because close at hand his four comrades slept peacefully, while he remained thus exasperatingly wide awake.

Suddenly, far away from the bosom of the lake, came a long, low moaning cry that thrilled the wakeful lad from his toes to the roots of his hair, for there was something weirdly doleful and terrible in that sound. Instantly he thought of the ghost of the dead hermit, which was said to haunt Spirit Island, and his teeth began to chatter a little. Never had be imagined that a night

in the woods could be so fraught with awesome and terrible sounds. He was tempted to awaken the others, but knew they would be angered and scoff at him if he did so. Of a sudden he thought of the gun, and, thrusting out his hand, touched the cold barrel of the weapon, which he had placed near by. Grasping it, he seemed to feel his courage returning.

"If anything comes around here it'll get hurt," he whispered to himself. "There won't be any fooling about it, either. I'll shoot."

As if applauding this courageous attitude on his part, he heard a sudden clapping sound, which seemed to come rushing toward the tent and cease abruptly.

"Now what was that?" he speculated, sitting up and holding the gun across his knees. "It was something. I'd just like to know."

Getting out of the blankets, he rose to a crouching position and stepped toward the front of the tent, the gun gripped fast in his fingers. The darkness outside was not nearly as deep as he had thought it would be, and he could plainly perceive the outlines of tree trunks near at hand.

Holding his breath, he crouched at the tent opening, gazing one way and another.

A fresh strong breath of air swept over the point, moving the tree tops and picking up a swirl of ashes from the fireplace, so that the last remaining coals were uncovered and fanned into a glow. And then, within ten feet of the fire, close to the trunk of a tree, he saw what appeared to be a black human-like body, above which rose a ghastly white face with two huge burning eyes. Those eyes of fire, seeming to glare upon him, sent cold chills darting along his spine. Immovable as a statue, he crouched, the gun in his hand forgotten for the moment.

Once more from the vague and distant bosom of the lake came that dreadful, doleful cry; and, as if in answer, a hoarse voice, half human yet demon-like, seemed to burst from the creature with the glowing eyes.

Gasping, Piper pushed the catch of the hammerless with his thumb, flung the butt of the gun to his shoulder, levelled the weapon at that black figure with the ghastly face and fiery eyes, and pulled both triggers.

CHAPTER V.

WITH ROD AND REEL.

A great flash of fire burst from the double muzzle of the gun, and a crashing report woke the echoes of the woods and went reverberating across the bosom of the lake. Although staggered a bit by the recoil of the weapon, Sleuth seemed to see the white head of the figure at which he had fired fly off into space and go sailing away, visible for a moment against the sky ere it disappeared.

Needless to say, the sound of the shot brought the sleeping campers off their bed of boughs uttering exclamations of astonishment, alarm and interrogation.

"Wha-wha-what's the mum-matter?" spluttered Springer.

"Great thutter!" gasped Crane. "Sleuth's shot at somethin'."

"What was it, Piper?" asked Stone.

"Yes, what did you fire at?" demanded Grant, reaching the agitated boy and grasping his shoulder.

"Oh, it was the most horrible thing you ever saw," palpitated Piper. "It was right out there under a tree, a big black creature with a face as white as a sheet and fiery eyes as large as saucers. It had a frightful voice that made my blood run cold as ice."

"Oh, come, Sleuth, what are you talking about?" remonstrated Rodney. "You've been dreaming."

"Not on your life!" retorted the still trembling lad. "Haven't even closed my eyes. I couldn't. I heard all sorts of creatures prowling around in the woods, and something wailing like a lost soul out there on the lake in the direction of Spirit Island. You fellows snoozed like a lot of dead ones," he continued resentfully. "You'd let Old Nick himself get you before you'd wake up. I never saw such a bunch of mummys."

Crane's fingers were not quite steady as he struck a match and lighted the lantern.

"Think yeou hit the critter, Sleuthy?" he asked.

"Hit it! You bet I did! Why, I just blew its old white head right off its shoulders. I saw that head go sailing through the air, too. You'll find out I hit it when you look around."

"I reckon," said Grant, "we'd better investigate. Come on with the lantern, Sile. Where did you say the thing was, Piper?"

"Right out there," answered Sleuth—"right out under that tree near the fireplace. Hadn't I better load the gun again before we go out?"

"Here, gug-give me that," snapped Springer, snatching the piece from Piper's hands. "You'll be shooting the top of somebody's head off yet. Now let's see what he fuf-fired at."

Directed by Sleuth, who timorously held back and permitted the others to precede him, they went forth to investigate, Crane leading with the lantern.

"Here 'tis," said Sile, holding up the light with one hand and pointing with the other. "I'll bet a dollar that's what Sleuthy fired at; and, so help

me Bob, it's his sleepin' bag hangin' over that limb!"

Springer, his agitated nerves suddenly relaxing, uttered a shout of laughter, in which the others joined, with the exception of Piper himself, who immediately began protesting that he had not fired at the dangling sleeping bag.

"That's not the thing," he rasped furiously. "I tell you what I shot at had a white head with big fiery eyes. Do you think I'm an idiot?"

"Let's see if he hit the bag," suggested Grant. "That will tell."

It did tell, for the light of the lantern showed them a ragged hole torn through the very center of the sleeping bag by the two charges of shot, and once more Sleuth's companions gave vent to unbridled merriment.

"Oh, this is the fuf-funniest thing yet," howled Springer, clinging to his sides. "Old Sleuthy shot his own sus-sleeping bag. And it had a white face with fiery eyes as big as saucers, and he blew the head of the thing right off and saw it go sus-sailing through the air! Oh, dear! oh, dear! I'll lose my breath!"

In sullen gloom Piper stood staring at the riddled sleeping bag. "I don't care what you say," he snarled; "it did have a white face with blazing eyes. Laugh, you mutts—laugh your heads off!"

"I won't get over this for a week!" choked Crane.

Even Stone was convulsed, and Rodney Grant was compelled to lean against the tree for support.

"It had a terrible voice—don't forget the voice," said Ben.

"And he heard something wailing like a lost soul out toward Spirit Island," put in Rod.

"Yes, I did; yes, I did!" rasped Piper repeatedly. "There—there it is now! Hear it yourselves! Now what do you think? Now what have you got to say?"

Out of the distance came a repetition of the cry which had contributed so much to the wakeful boy's alarm.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" came again from Springer, as he rubbed his sides with both hands.

"It's a loon—nothing but a loon. They always holler lul-like that."

"A loon!" muttered Sleuth, crestfallen. "It is? Well, anyhow, I know what I saw, and I'll stick to it about the white face and the fiery eyes."

Crane had placed the lantern on the ground almost beneath the dangling sleeping bag, and now Grant stooped and picked up something revealed by the light.

"Here's a white feather," he said. "A stray shot from Sleuth's gun may have knocked it out of some sort of a bird. That's it, I reckon; he saw a white owl that had lighted on the very branch this bag hangs from. That accounts for the big fiery eyes and the terrible voice."

Piper was struck dumb; he tried to say something, but the words choked in his throat and he abandoned the effort. Mercilessly his companions joshed him, and he realized that his exploits on this first night in camp were destined to provide a topic for raillery for some time to come. With his head down, he turned and plunged into the tent. They found him wrapped in the blankets and stretched on the ground, and to their con-

tinued badinage he would utter no word of retort.

With the first gray streaks of morning showing in the eastern sky, Springer attempted to arouse Piper and get him up.

"Come on, Sleuth," he said. "You want to fish, and this is the time to get at it."

"Go on," was the smothered retort. "I'm going to get some sleep. Fish all you want to; I don't care."

Grant was up in a moment. "I'm with you, Phil," he said. "Let's take a plunge and a rubdown to wake us up, then we can try the fishing, and leave the others to start the fire and have things ready for breakfast when we get back."

Flinging off everything, they raced out to the rocky side of the point, and Sleuth heard them go plunging into the water, one after the other. With a shivering sigh, for the damp coldness of the earth had crept up through the ground-cloth and blankets and seemed to pierce his bones, Piper got upon his hands and knees, crawled to the bed of boughs just deserted, pulled the blankets of the others around him and again courted

slumber. Hazily he heard the early risers return, rub down with coarse towels and get into their clothes. They were putting their rods and reels together when he drifted off for the first time into sound and peaceful sleep.

Rod and Phil made their way slowly along the lake shore toward the south, casting the flies as they went, at which feat Springer, having had more experience, was by far the most skilful.

"It's the back-snap that does it, Rod," he explained. "Don't swing your whole arm so hard; use your wrist more. If you can get a good sharp back-snap and time the forward movement of your hand properly, you'll catch on pup-pretty soon. You don't want to cast out as hard as you bring the line back, for if you do you'll snap the fly like a crack of a whip, and you may even snap it off. Watch me now."

Rodney watched and saw his companion send the fly soaring far out on the water with a double movement of the wrist, sharp and then gentle, and scarcely any movement whatever of the shoulder.

"It sure looks right simple," confessed the

Texan. I can do it fairly well with a short bit of line, but I get plenty balled up when I try to let it out and make a longer cast."

Phil reeled in and gave a demonstration of the proper manner to whip a line out by repeated casts, drawing off more and more from the reel with the left hand and holding the slack until the proper moment to let it run. Indeed, as Grant had said, it seemed an extremely simple thing to do, and Rodney, being an apt pupil, soon began to get the knack of it, and was not discouraged, although he repeatedly made a failure right on the heels of a very praiseworthy effort.

"You're getting it all right," encouraged Springer. "You're doing sus-splendidly."

"There I go into a bush," said Rod, as his fly caught in some shrubbery at a distance behind him.

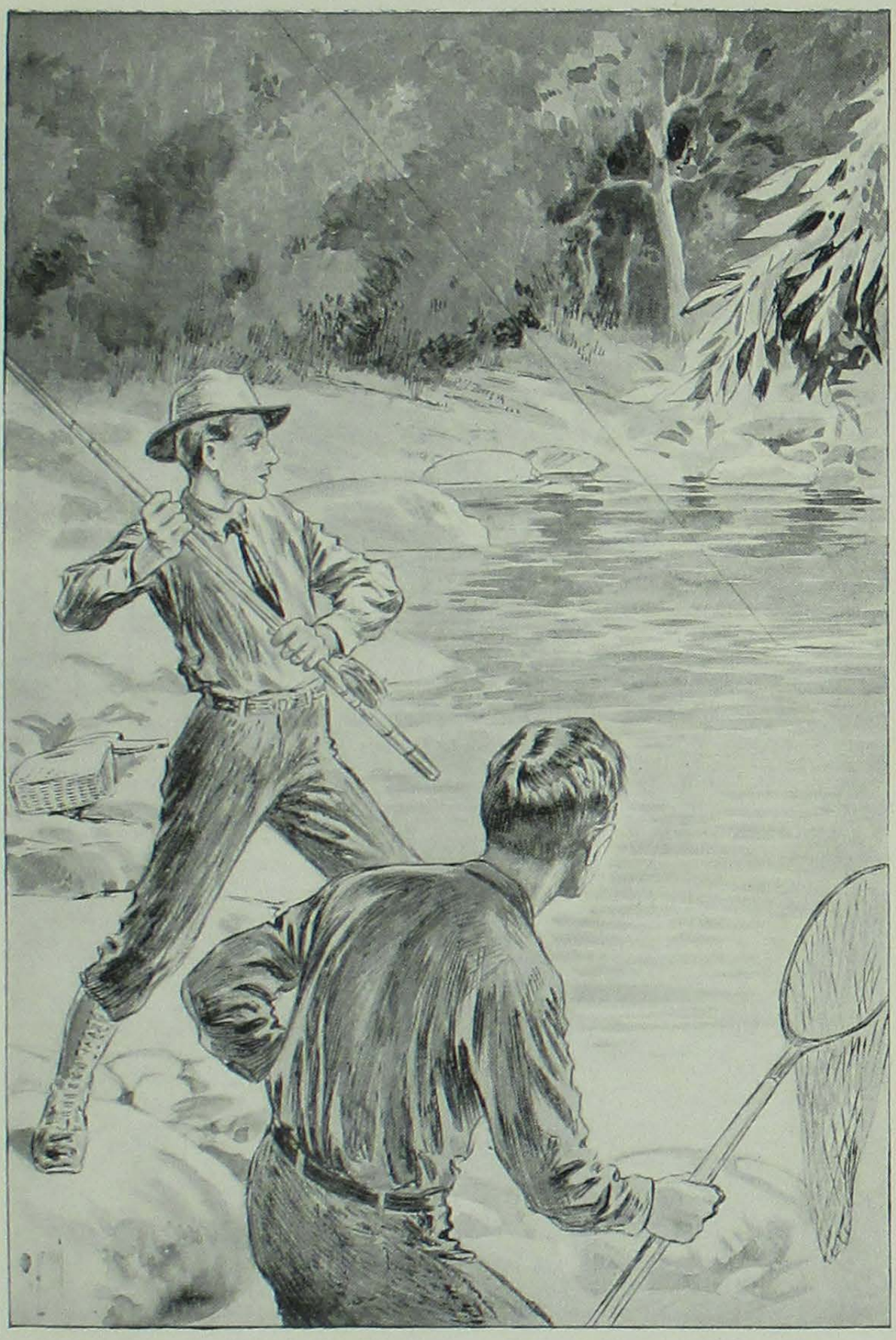
"Never mind that. You'll need pup-plenty of room at first, and you'll keep forgetting every little while to make your back cast good and sharp and your forward cast easy. The two movements must be tut-timed just right, too."

"It must be right good sport when there are fish to catch, but we don't seem to get any bites."

"There are fuf-fish enough in the lake," declared Phil. "Wait till we find them. It's only the real true fisherman who has plenty of pup-patience and perseverance; the ordinary fellow gets tired and quits after a short time. He seems to think he ought to find fuf-fish anywhere and everywhere. Perhaps the flies we have on are not right, and we'll try some others as we mum-move along."

In the east the pearly gray light was taking on the tint of pink coral, and gradually this deep-ened, until it displayed the tone of a red-cheeked apple dangling from an orchard branch in autumn. Presently the white cross marking the cliff called "Lovers' Leap" at the further side of the lake gleamed out golden bright, like the spire of a church. The morning air was clear and sweet with the faint odors of the woods, and it seemed to effect the boys like wine, filling their bodies with vibrating energy and tingling en-thusiasm.

Although Springer paused to change his flies



THERE WAS A SWIRL, A SNAP AT THE LINE, A SHARP BENDING OF THE ROD—THE FISH WAS HOOKED.

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as they moved along, trying in turn a "Morning Glory," "Parmacheenee Belle," "Silver Doctor" and "Brown Hackle," it was not until he cast into the shadow of some overhanging bushes at the mouth of a brook that he had a strike. There, almost as soon as the hackle sailed out and dropped lightly upon the smooth surface of the water, there was a swirl, a snap at the line, a sharp bending of the delicate bamboo rod; and the clear, buzzing whirr of the multiple reel told that the fish was hooked and running with the fly.

CHAPTER VI.

A MORNING'S SPORT.

Instantly both boys were athrob with excitement, although Springer, handling the rod and "playing" the fish, was somewhat less agitated than Grant, who immediately dropped his own tackle and seized the landing net, ready to render such assistance as he might.

"He sure must be a dandy, Phil," palpitated the Texan, his cheeks flushed and his eyes glowing. "Great Scott! see the rod bend. He hasn't jumped yet. Don't they jump?"

"If it's a sus-sus-salmon," stuttered Phil, swiftly winding in as the fish ceased its spurt and yielded a little, "it will jump; and maybe it will if it's a bub-bass. It may not break water at all if it's a tut-trout."

Heedless of wet feet, Phil waded out until the water had reached to the knees of his canvas trousers, and there he stood, displaying no small

amount of skill at the delightful task of baffling and tiring the fighting fish. Whenever the finny victim grew weary and permitted the line to slacken the angler reeled in, keeping it fairly taut, all the while prepared to let the reel run when it was necessary. In this manner, following the fish's repeated breaks for liberty, the boy gradually brought it closer, admonishing his companion, who had likewise waded out and was waiting near at hand, to be ready to dip with the net when told to do so.

It was indeed exciting work, which kept them keyed to the highest tension. Both knew what it was to experience the fierce thrills of a savage football clash and the triumphant elation of brilliant and successful work upon the baseball field, but in the sport of this midsummer morning hour there was something different, yet quite as intensely enjoyable and blood-stirring. The reason, perhaps, lay in the fact that both possessed the natural instincts of the sportsman who finds the highest pleasure in a fair and honorable battle where victory and defeat hang in the balance until the last moment. For until

the net should lift the fish from its native element they could not know how securely or how lightly it was hooked, and it was possible that, through a sudden swirling struggle of the creature itself or an inopportune tautening of the line just when it turned desperately to run away, it might tear itself free and escape.

Three times Grant made ready to dip, and once he sunk the net deep in the water; and three times the weakening fish darted off, setting the reel whirring. On the last occasion both lads obtained a good view of the finny fellow, magnified by the water, and therefore looking large indeed.

"He certain is a corker, Phil," breathed Grant. "Bring him up again. I'll get him next time."

"Sink the net as I reel him toward you," instructed Springer, "and be ready to make a quick scoop under him. Here he comes now."

Moving a bit heavily and slowly in protest against the treatment it was receiving, the fish was reeled in toward Grant, who obeyed directions faithfully, accomplishing the final *coup* by a swift forward and upward movement of the sunken net.

"Ah-ha!" exulted Springer. "That's the sus-stuff! You did it fine, Rod."

They waded ashore, and Phil, thrusting a thumb and finger into the fish's gills, lifted the shining, spotted trout, flapping helplessly, from amid the meshes.

"Look!" he cried proudly. "Just had him caught by the corner of the lip. A pull an ounce too hard would have lost him."

"Say," said the Texan approvingly, "I opine you handled that baby right skilful. Jingoes! but he's a beaut. Must weight better than two pounds."

"Two and a-half, I should say," nodded Phil, regarding his catch with a self-satisfied air. "He'll go well for bub-breakfast."

Rodney smacked his lips. "I should guess yes. Two or three more like that will make a mess for a hungry bunch."

The creature was placed in the basket they had brought for that purpose, and Grant, eager to emulate his friend's example, soon recovered his abandoned rod and resumed casting. Springer likewise lost little time in once more applying

himself to the task of whipping the pool at the mouth of the brook.

By this time the sun was up, and in the near-by dewy thickets they could occasionally hear the flutter of a wing or the rustle of a running squirrel. The morning was breathless, and the surface of the lake reflected the sunlight like a polished mirror; but under the bushes along the shore were shadows in which trout might lie, and the artificial flies at the ends of the silken lines went dropping into those shadows and skimming across them, propelled by gentle movements of the rods that gave the luring baits the lifelike appearance of swimming insects.

At intervals Grant caught his hook in the bushes or tangled his line, but he could see that he was really making some progress in the art of casting, and he held his patience, despite these annoying interruptions.

And it was Rodney who got the second strike. He saw the swirl of the darting fish and gave the rod a sharp jerk, after the manner of Springer, instantly shot through by a thrill as he felt the

line tighten, saw the bamboo bend and heard his reel humming.

"You've got him!" cried Phil. "Now pup-play him—play him carefully. Don't let him have the slack when he stops. Be ready to reel in."

In the excitement of the shifting of the rod from one hand to the other and getting ready to work the reel Grant gave the fish some slack, but was relieved, when he wound in, to find the creature had not broken away.

"Not too hard," admonished Springer. "Don't hold him tut-too hard when he tries to run."

"I must have hooked him in good shape, or he'd sure freed himself right away," said the Texan. "Look at my rod bend. He must be a whopper."

The tugs and thrills of the vibrating rod seemed to permeate his entire body, causing his heart to leap and skip and his breath to come quickly through his nostrils. It was characteristic of the boy from Texas that in moments of stress he always kept his teeth set and his lips pressed together.

But Rod did not possess the angling skill of

Springer, and presently, with a sudden tremendous swirl and splash, the fish caught him unprepared and jerked the rod downward till the tip almost touched the water. A moment later the strain upon the line relaxed, the end of the rod sprung back, and Phil uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"You've lul-lost him!"

"I opine that's right," confessed Grant, reeling in slowly, a comical expression of dejection upon his face. "The way he pulled he must have been a monster. It's too bad, and I'm certain a rotten fisherman."

"It's always the bub-biggest ones that get away, you know," laughed Phil cheerfully. "Chirk up, Rod; nobody gets them all. There ought to be more in here."

But, although they continued to whip the mouth of the brook for some time, not another rise could they get.

"One isn't enough for breakfast," said Grant. "We ought to have more."

"Let's work up the brook," suggested Phil. "You take one side, and I'll follow the other.

Just watch me and cuc-creep along quietly, the way I do. Don't let your shadow fall on the water, and try to drop your fly into the pools without showing yourself to the fish that may lie there."

He forded the brook a short distance above its mouth, and they began following it upward along a sort of ravine that cut through the woods.

In a few moments, dropping the flies into a quiet pool below the projecting end of a water-soaked log, both got a strike at the same time, and each one hooked his fish. Then there was sport and excitement enough, it being no simple matter to keep their lines from becoming tangled in that small pool. Neither of the fish, however, was nearly as large as the one already caught, and, after dipping his own in a genuinely skilful way, Phil used the net to secure Grant's. Both were trout, weighing, probably, three-fourths of a pound each.

"There!" breathed Rod in deep satisfaction; "I'm an angler now, for I really caught something worth while with a fly-rod. Roping a steer is a heap more dangerous and strenuous, but the

person who makes game of this sort of sport sure doesn't know what he's talking about."

Continuing to follow the brook, they found sport enough to satisfy any genuine Nimrod, and ere long the basket contained a catch numbering at least a full dozen.

"I suppose it's time we were getting back to camp," said Springer at last. "The others must be up by this time, and hungry. They'll wonder what has become of us."

"I hate to quit," admitted Rodney. "I could fish all day, I reckon."

"You're an angler all right," laughed Phil. "You've gug-got the fuf-fever. But you mustn't try to catch all the fish at once, you know. This brook won't run away, and we'll try it again."

"Let's look; let's see how many we have," urged Grant. "Open the basket, Phil."

Springer had recrossed the brook, and he paused to comply with his companion's request. The basket opened, they gazed with admiring eyes at the spotted beauties within, some of which were still breathing and moving. They were thus

engaged when a startling interruption caused them to spring up swiftly and turn their heads.

"Here, you fellers!" rasped a harsh voice. "What are you doing, fishing in this brook? It's private property."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENCOUNTER AT THE BROOK.

The head of the speaker, crowned by an old straw hat, rose above a clump of alders on the opposite bank of the stream. His coatless shoulders, over one of which ran a single suspender, likewise could be seen. He wore no collar, and his shirt was open at the throat, exposing a hairy bit of chest. A "peeled" fishing pole, projecting upward beside him, betrayed the purpose of his visit to the brook at that early hour.

Somewhat less than twenty years of age, he was not a prepossessing looking fellow as he glared angrily at the surprised fishermen, who returned his gaze in silence, seemingly stricken dumb for the moment by his startling and unwelcome appearance.

"Say, you fellers," again called the stranger in that challenging, threatening tone of anger,

"what business you got fishing in this here brook? You'll git into trouble, trespassin' on private property."

"Jug-jug-jingoes!" breathed Springer. "He gave me a start."

"Is this brook private property?" asked Grant coolly.

"Is it?" snapped the fellow on the opposite side. "Of course 'tis. Everything's private property 'round here. S'pose this land ain't owned by nobody? You ought to know better'n that. Who be you, anyhow?"

"We're camping near by on the lake," explained Rod, maintaining his unruffled manner, "and we were not told that the streams running into this lake were closed by law."

"They don't haf to be closed by law, and I guess you know it, too," was the retort. "Any man has got a right to keep trespassers off his property."

"Do you own this brook?"

"My old man owns it, and that's the same thing. We don't 'low nobody but ourselves to fish it."

"Have you posted signs, warning trespassers to keep off?" questioned Rodney. "We didn't see any."

"Nun-nary one," put in Phil.

"If you had," flung back the angry fellow, "I don't s'pose you'd paid no 'tention to them, or else you'd ripped 'em down."

"But you haven't put up any such signs?" persisted Grant.

"That don't make no difference at all," declared the stranger, coming out from behind the alders and revealing a lean, muscular figure, with slightly stooped shoulders. "You hadn't no right to fish here till you found out."

"We were told we could fish anywhere on the lake or around it."

"Who told ye that?"

"Herman Duckelstein."

"That thick-headed old Dutchman? He don't know nothin'. I've had to near punch the head off his pie-faced boy to keep him in his place."

With calm, keen eyes the Texan took the measure of the arrogant stranger, betraying no symp-

tom of alarm, a fact which seemed to increase the fellow's irritation.

"So you near punched the head off Carl Duckelstein, did you?" said Grant, with a touch of scorn. "And I opine you're two or three years older than he, while it's right plain you're much taller and stronger. You ought to be mighty proud of that performance. What's you're name?"

The eyes of the chap on the opposite bank glared still more fiercely, and his lips, drawn back a little, revealed some uneven snags in crying need of a toothbrush.

"That ain't none of your business," he retorted; but I don't mind tellin' ye it's Simpson—Jim Simpson. My father, Hank Simpson, owns this strip of land, sixty-three acres, running from the lake back to the main road, and we don't propose to have no trespassers on it. Understand that. What fish there is in this brook we want for ourselves."

"Where does your land begin? Where is the boundary on this side toward Pleasant Point?"

"That ain't none of your business, either.

Think I'm going to bother to tell you where the bound'ries are? You're on our property, and you want to get off and stay off, I tell ye that. If ye don't——" He lifted his clenched fist in a threatening gesture.

"Regular sus-scrapper, isn't he?" chuckled Springer, who, stimulated by his companion's example, had become outwardly cool and undisturbed.

As far as Rod was concerned, this calmness was all outward seeming, for beneath the surface his naturally belligerent disposition had been aroused by the threatening truculence and insolence of young Simpson.

"If you don't tell us where your boundary line is," said Rod, in that quiet way which Simpson mistook for timidity, "how are we going to know when we're trespassing? We're camping on Pleasant Point, and——"

"If you don't come over this way you won't do no trespassin', and you'll be likely to save yourselves a lot of trouble."

"But what if we do come this way? What sort of trouble will we get into?"

"You'll get your heads everlastingly lammed off your shoulders, that's what," snarled Jim Simpson.

"You seem to consider it your specialty to lam folks' heads off their shoulders. I've seen a heap of pugnacious parties like you before this, and I've always observed that if they were persevering enough they eventually succeeded in getting a lamming themselves."

"What's that?" shouted the fellow, dropping his fishing pole and starting forward into the brook until the water rose round the ankles of the long-legged boots into which his trousers were tucked. "What're you doin', making fightin' talk to me? If you be, by heck, I'll come over there and hand you one right on the kisser!"

"You'd better stay where you are, I reckon," returned Rodney in continued calmness. "I'm not looking for a scrap, having learned by observation that the gent who prances round with a chip on his shoulder sure gets it knocked off by a better chap some day."

"Gee whiz!" hissed Springer. "He's gug-going to come over! It looks like a mix-up."

"If he picks up a fight, leave him to me," said Rodney, in a low tone. "We're not hunting for trouble, but I admit this gent's deportment is right displeasing to me, and I don't think it advisable to let him browbeat us or drive us away like frightened sheep."

Picking the shallow places, Jim Simpson waded the brook, maintaining a fierce and threatening manner, though possibly he was somewhat surprised by the lack of alarm evinced in the bearing of the young campers.

"You'll find there ain't no fooling about this business," he declared, as he emerged from the water and paused a few feet distant, beginning to roll up his shirt sleeves. "You better skedaddle before I pitch into ye. I don't want to hurt ye, but——"

"That's right kind of you," scoffed Rod. "I opined by your remarks that you were yearning to hand us a sample lamming. If we had been properly warned in advance, or had seen 'No trespassing' signs hereabouts, we might not have fished in this brook."

Simpson seemed to interpret this as a conces-

sion or symptom of backing down, and it made him still more arrogant in his manner.

"I told ye you'd better skedaddle, to start with, but you was chumps enough to stand and argue with me, and you even handed me some sass. I won't take sass from nobody like you, by heck! Now you've got jest about ten seconds to pick up and hiper. Dig, I tell ye—dig out!"

"We're no diggers," returned the Texan, whose eyes had swiftly taken cognizance of the immediate footing, that he might not stumble over any obstruction upon the ground in the encounter which seemed unavertible save by retreat. He has passed his rod to Springer, in order that his hands might be free.

"There'll be some doings," Phil whispered to himself, "when Mr. Simpson attempts to put his bub-brand on this Texas maverick."

Phil knew Rod's nature—knew that he was a quiet, peaceful chap, who never sought trouble and usually tried to avoid it when he could without positive loss of self-respect. Furthermore, Phil was aware by observation that, when aroused through physical violence, the boy from

Texas, having a fiery temper, was a most formidable and dangerous antagonist.

Well aware of his own volcanic nature when provoked or aroused, since coming to Oakdale, it had been Rodney Grant's constant purpose to hold himself in check and master the fighting strain in his blood. In this he had succeeded at first only by avoiding violent clashes of any sort, which had, for the time being, given him among the Oakdale lads the reputation of being something of a coward. In the end, however, circumstances and events had conspired to reveal their mistake of judgment, and had led them to acknowledge Rodney as a thoroughbred in whose veins there was not one craven drop.

Feeling certain he knew quite well what would happen to Simpson if the fellow attacked Rod, Phil believed it a duty to give him fair warning.

"Sus-say, look a' here," he cried, pointing a finger at the pugnacious rustic, "if you don't want to get the worst lul-licking you ever had, you better keep away from this fellow. He'll pup-punch the packing out of you in just about two jabs."

"Ho! ho! Is that so!" mocked Simpson. "Why, I can wallop the both of you, and not half try. I'll learn ye to fish in our brook! So that's what ye ketched, is it?" he went on, his eye falling on the contents of the basket, at sight of which he became still more enraged. "Well, you won't take any of them to your old camp." With a sudden swing of his heavy boot, he kicked the basket over and sent the fish flying toward the water, some of them falling into it.

A moment later, as Springer scrambled frantically to recover as many of those fish as possible, Grant, moving like lightning, seized Simpson by the neck and a convenient part of his trousers and pitched him sprawling into the brook.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE FROM THE SHOULDER.

Spluttering, choking, snarling, the astonished recipient of this summary treatment scrambled to his feet, dripping and as enraged as a mad bull. Brushing the water from his eyes with a sweep of his hand, he beheld Grant, hands on his hips, standing as if waiting, wholly unconcerned.

With a roar, Simpson splashed out of the water, his boot-legs full and sloshing, and charged at Rodney.

"Oh," said Springer, recovering two of the trout from the water and tossing them back into the basket, "the performance is just beginning in the big tut-tent; the circus has started."

The performance, however, terminated quite as suddenly as it had commenced. Stepping deftly aside as the fellow rushed, Grant swung hard and accurately, planting his fist against Simpson's jaw. Down with a crash went the pug-

nacious rustic, dazed and wondering at a tremendous display of fireworks, which seemed to be celebrating a belated Fourth, in his upper story. Indeed, for the time being the fellow had not the slightest idea of what had happened to him.

It was a good thing for Jim Simpson that all the fight had thus quickly been knocked out of him, for Springer saw the old wild light of ungovernable rage blaze in Grant's eyes, and beheld on the face of the Texan an expression which seemed to threaten utter annihilation for his antagonist. And, as Rod took a stride in the direction of the chap who was weakly trying to lift himself upon one elbow, Phil cried sharply:

"That's enough, Rod! Dud-don't hit him again, or you *will* knock his bub-bub-block off."

The Texan checked himself sharply, and the fighting flare faded from his eyes, while his face resumed its normal expression.

"You've whipped him a'ready," asserted Phil, still apprehensive. "You took the fuf-fight out of him with the fuf-first wallop. If he's got any sense at all, he won't want any more."

Three times Simpson attempted to lift himself

before he was able to sit up, and when he succeeded he was forced to hold his swimming head in his hands. His appearance was so pitiful that neither of the boys felt in the least inclined to laugh.

"Why, he can't fight at all," said Grant. "I wonder how he ever got the notion that he could?"

"Knocking the block off such chaps as Carl Duckelstein, I calculate," said Phil.

"I reckon that's right. Heaps of these self-judged fighters get false notions of their scrapping abilities through whipping fellows no way their equals; and when that happens they're pretty sure to go prancing round in search of other worlds to conquer, until somebody hands them what's coming to them."

Slowly and weakly Simpson lifted his head and stared around like one just beginning to comprehend. There was still a ringing in his brain, but the lights had ceased to flash, and he perceived his own position and observed the fellow he had sought to attack standing near at hand, untouched, steady and now calm as ever. For the

first time he began to understand that this calmness did not indicate timidity, and, understanding, he was filled with awe bordering on fear.

"I reckon, stranger," said Grant, "that you're not hurt much; but I hope you've tumbled to the fact that you can't fight any more than a gopher with the croup. If this brook belongs to your governor, and you'd been half decent about asking us not to fish in it, I reckon we'd found plenty of other places to enjoy the sport. But you chose to come at us with spurs on, and you got bucked a plenty when you tried your broncho busting."

This caused Springer to laugh at last. "The idiom of the West is certainly expressive," he observed. "And one time we thought you a fake because you didn't say 'galoot' and 'varmint' and such bub-book lingo of supposed-to-be Westerners."

Simpson made no retort, and, as he continued to sit there, the boys gathered up their tackle and the basket containing the trout and prepared to depart.

"If, on further consideration," said Grant, turning to him, "you should hold to the notion

that you still have a grievance, you'll find us over at Pleasant Point."

"So long, Simpy," called Phil, unable to repress a parting fling. "Hope your headache don't lul-last long."

They were some distance away when they heard him, his courage revived, shouting after them:

"You better git! Come round this brook again, and see what happens to you!"

"Well," chuckled Springer, as they pushed their way through the thickets, "this has been a real lul-lively morning. We've had sport enough for one day."

"I'm glad you called to me just when you did, Phil," said Rodney. "I was getting a touch of that old blazing rage that always makes me lose my head complete."

"A tut-touch of it! Great Caesar! I wish you could have seen your own face. I thought you were going to obliterate Mr. Simpson then and there."

At the camp Stone and Crane were waiting, and the smoke of the brisk fire rose into the still

air. The sight of the white tent, the dancing blaze and their waiting friends was good indeed to the returning anglers, who gave a hail as they approached. Sile answered the call with a question:

"Did you fellers ketch anything? I'll bate yeou ain't had a bit of fun."

"Oh, is that sus-so!" scoffed Phil hurrying forward with the basket. "Fun! We've had more than you could sus-shake a stick at."

"But have you ketched anything?" persisted Crane.

Springer waited until he could place the basket before them and lift the cover. When this was done they broke into exclamations of admiration and delight.

"Jiminy cripes!" sputtered Sile. "Here's a breakfast fit for a king. Yeou *must* have had fun, sure enough."

"All sorts," said Phil; and then he proceeded in his whimsical faltering way, to tell of the encounter with Jim Simpson.

"Just one cuc-crack, that's all Rod had to hand him," he finished. "It cooked his goose quicker

than you could say Juj-Juj-Juj-Jack Rob-bib-bib-binson."

"It sartain wasn't so very quick," returned Sile, "unless it was done quicker than yeou can say Jack Robinson. I'll clean the fish. Ben, yeou get ready to fry 'em."

"Where's Sleuth?" asked Grant.

"Oh, he isn't up yet," said Stone.

"Not up?" whooped Springer. "Then I'll pup-pull him out in a hurry."

But Piper had heard them and was dressing. Presently he came forth, looking grouchy enough, and had no word of applause for the success of the anglers.

Nevertheless, when the fish were cooked he ate his share.

CHAPTER IX.

CARL DUCKELSTEIN FISHES.

That breakfast was, in truth, one not to be soon forgotten. Such appetities as those boys had, whetted and sharpened by bounding health and the tonic of the great, clean, unpolluted outdoor world! It was the tempting sight and delightful odor of trout frying in a pan of deep fat that really put the feather edge on their hunger. Fortunately, they had bread enough, and, even though Carl Duckelstein had not appeared with milk for their coffee, never in the memory of one there had food tasted so delicious.

"Um-mum!" mumbled Crane, his mouth full. "I cal'lated I'd et fish before, but, by Jinks! I was mistook; this is the fust time. Stoney, either yeou're a rip tearin' cook, or them's the sweetest trout that ever swum."

"I opine Ben is sure some cook," said Grant;

"but, likewise, I reckon these trout must be pretty good."

"They ought to be," grinned Springer, forking another fish on to his tin plate. "We had to fuf-fight for 'em. That is, Rod did."

"It wasn't really a fight," said the Texan. "I wonder if we'll hear anything more from James Simpson."

"Don't believe so," said Phil. "It's my opinion he got enough to satisfy him. What's the matter, Sleuthy? You're yawning. Didn't you sus-sleep well last night?"

"Bah!" mocked Piper. "You know I didn't sus-sus-sleep well. I feel like a fool this morning."

"Sort of a natteral feelin', hey?" laughed Crane unsympathetically.

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard," put in Stone, by way of a thrust. "I really don't wonder that you shot a hole in that old sleeping bag, Pipe, for it certainly was alive."

"Is it possible," said Grant, "that you failed to acquire wisdom from the owl last night? If you had listened attentively to its 'frightful voice'

I'm sure the creature would have told you *who's who* around here."

"Yah! I s'pose you think you're funny, the whole of you!" rasped Piper, whose sense of humor, if he had any, was doubly dulled by the fact that the joke was on him. "I s'pose you've got to have somebody to pick on, but don't rub it in too hard. That's all I've got to say: don't rub it in too hard. Many a man, driven desperate by similar treatment, has risen in his wrath and given his torturers just cause to rue their rashness."

"Look aout for Sleuthy," warned Crane. "Don't forget that we're in the land of the bloodthirsty Wampanoags, and if we drive him to desperation mebbe he'll turn renegade and betray us into the hands of murderous redskins."

"That," observed the Texan soberly, "would be right bad for us. I know," he added reminiscently, "for didn't I have an experience with painted Indians shortly after coming to Oakdale? Why, they even tried to burn me to the stake."

"And by sus-so doing," declared Springer, "they made a mistake, as they afterwards found

out. I ought to know, for I was one of those redskins."

Crane breathed a sigh, rubbed his hand over his stomach and gazed regretfully at the remnants of the fried fish.

"I declare," he confessed, "I didn't cal'late when Stoney was cookin' them that there'd be half enough for us, but now I'm chock full, and I'll be switched if there ain't goin' to be some scraps left."

"Mighty small scraps," laughed Grant. "I think we've cleaned things up pretty well. But if Phil and I hadn't made this catch we'd fared rather slim, with Duckelstein failing to bring the provisions he promised to have here bright and early."

"I don't sus-suppose that sleepyhead is awake yet," said Phil, moving back in a manner which indicated that he had finished. "We'll be lucky if he gets our canoe over from Pemstock today."

"With plenty of fish in these pellucid waters," said Piper, whose spirits seemed to be reviving, "there's no reason why we should perish of hun-

ger, even though the pack train of provisions is delayed."

"I guess that's right," chuckled Crane. "We mustn't forgit that we have in aour midst an angler we can rely on when all others fail. Sleuthy ain't had a chance yet to demonstrate his ability in that line."

"I think I'll do so right away," said Piper. "I'll get out my tackle and try the fish without delay."

"You've gug-got another guess coming," said Springer. "There's dishes to wash and other work to do around this camp, and we're not going to let you sus-sneak off to fish while the rest of us do the work. You can't pup-play that game on us."

Baffled, Piper, who abhorred work, reluctantly abandoned his design, and again it became his duty to wash the dishes, a task at which his soul revolted.

There was still enough to do around the camp, and when the breakfast dishes were cleared away, the blankets brought forth and hung up for an airing and the tent tidied, they decided to build a dining table. This was located beneath a

tree that would afford cool shade in the middle of the day. There four stakes were driven into the ground for legs, to the tops of which, running lengthwise, were nailed long, straight poles, hewn flat on two sides with the axe. Then, taking one of the larger boxes carefully to pieces by drawing the nails, they obtained boards sufficient to form the table top. Following this, a bench on the same principle was made on each side of the table.

"There," said Stone in satisfaction, as he stood back and surveyed the completed work, "that looks pretty good to me. Now we can dine in comfort, like civilized human beings."

By this time the forenoon was advancing and the sun blazing hotly from an unclouded sky. However, a slight breeze had risen to ripple the lake, and its tempering breath blew gratefully across the point, proving that, considering the season, the camping spot had been well chosen for comfort.

"I wonder where that sleepy Dutchman can be?" speculated Rodney.

As if in answer, the sound of wagon wheels

were heard, and in a few moments the old white horse came into view, drawing a farm wagon on which the canoe rested, bottom upward. Sitting on the wagon, a dumpy figure held the reins and nodded with every swaying movement, eyes tightly closed. Even when the old horse came to a full stop a short distance from the camp, Carl Duckelstein slept on.

"What do you think of that, fellows?" laughed Grant.

Awkwardly tiptoeing forward, Crane reached the wagon, bent forward, placed his lips within a foot of Carl's head and gave utterance to an ear-splitting yell. If he had expected to see the Dutch boy awaken in a terrified manner, Sile was much disappointed, for Carl slowly lifted one hand, brushed at his ear, and thickly mumbled:

"Got avay, mosquito."

The laughter that followed caused Carl to pry his eyes open with considerable effort, following which he surveyed the laughing lads with a dumb, comical expression of perplexity.

"Vot it vas?" he yawned. "Vhere iss it I am yet?"

"Why don't you do yeour sleepin' nights?" snapped Crane disgustedly.

"Some of my sleeping does do me nights," returned the fat boy; "but enough of it couldt not get me. Goot morning. Your canoes I haf brought—undt der milks undt der eggs undt der putter."

"You certain took your time about it," said Grant. "You agreed to bring the milk and eggs and butter early, and pack the canoe in to us later on."

"Yah," acknowledged Carl complacently; "but I out figured it dot I couldt vurk save by doing him all at vunce. It iss now did; I haf with me brought eferything, undt I vill not haf to dood him twice."

"Carl," said Stone, "you've got a long head."

"Yah," returned the boy, with a touch of pride, "I peliefe a long head hass got me."

"But if we hadn't cuc-caught plenty of fish," said Springer, "we might have starved for all of you."

"Nefer mind dot. Didt you some fish catch already yet? Vhere didt dese fish get you?"

"Out of the brook over yonder, and I tell you they were bub-beauties; handsomest trout you ever saw. We run across a fuf-friend of yours over there, a fellow by the name of Jim Simpson."

"Chim Skimpson didn't peen no friendship uf mine," cried Carl, with a surprising display of spirit. "Efery time he sees me it iss a fight he vants to up pick. Dot Chim Skimpson didt not like me. Sometimes, ven der chance gets me, I vill hit him mit a club."

"It was right evident to us," said Grant, "that Mr. Simpson thought himself quite a scrapper, but I opine he's changed his mind some."

"I gug-guess he has," laughed Springer. "Say, Dutchy, you should have seen this Texas longhorn polish off Jim Simpson in double-quick time. Simpson tut-tried to drive us away from the brook, claiming it belonged to his old man; but Grant pitched him into the water, and then, when he came tearing out, frothing for a scrap, Rod whipped him with a sus-single wallop on the jaw."

"Vot?" squawked Carl, in still greater excite-

ment, scrambling off the wagon. "Vot iss it you didt told me? Iss it dot you didt vhip Chim Skimpson? I couldt not peliefe it possibility."

"It's a fact," declared Phil, "and it only took one wallop from Grant's fuf-fist to settle his hash."

Spluttering his delight over this piece of intelligence, the Dutch boy rushed at Rodney and clasped him in his arms.

"Mine gootness! I vill hug you for dot. Mine cracious! I couldt kiss you for dot."

"Don't!" entreated Rod, pushing his overjoyed admirer away with some difficulty. "I did it on my own account, although I will confess it afforded me additional satisfaction because of his boast that he had thrashed you. Is that brook on Simpson's land?"

"His land didt begin der prook at."

"And he doesn't own any territory on this side of the brook?"

"Nefer a foot uf territories owns him this side uf der prook on."

"Then anybody can fish the brook without

trespassing by following along the nearest bank?"

"Yah," nodded Carl. "Uf you fish along der nearest side avay from us, you vill not trespass. Undt you didt vallop Chim Skimpson! Dot inflamation almost makes me cry for choy."

"Come, fellers," invited Crane, "let's unload the canoe and launch her. Git holt."

Lifting the light craft, they bore it to the water's edge in the sandy cove, Sile expressing his eagerness to try it out. The paddles were produced, and soon Crane and Springer were afloat in the canoe, propelling it with considerable skill, the others watching them from the point.

"Dot vas too much like vurk," murmured the Dutch boy, shaking his head. "It vould not like me at all."

"Still fishing would be the sport for you, I judge," said Grant.

"Yah, undt der stiller it vas der petter. I vould like to try him now uf I had the outfits."

"Where would you fish?"

"Der vater in, uf course. I vould like to haf a goot mess uf fish to take me home for dinner."

"We can provide you with tackle, but no bait for still fishing. We have nothing but flies for casting."

"Dot kind uf bait didt not use me," said Carl solemnly; "but uf you vill let me haf the tackles, I vill der bait get. Yah."

Rodney brought forth a stout steel rod, which he quickly put together and to which he attached a line-wound reel. The line being run through the eyelets, he bent on a leader and hook and nipped some split shot into place, to serve as sinkers.

"There you are," he said, handing the outfit over to Ducklestein. "Now go ahead and fish as much as you like."

"I vas much opliged," grinned the Dutch boy. "I vill get some bait undt fish der rocks off, undt see what vill catch me. I hope it vas not an eels. An eels iss a pad fish und I didt not like him. An eels I vould not touch uf you vould a hundred tollars gif me."

"I don't think you're likely to catch an eel off those rocks," said Rod.

A short distance from the point was a bit of wet shore, where Carl proceeded to search for his bait, turning over a number of flat rocks and capturing some wiggling creatures, which he calmly put into his pocket. When he had secured enough of these, he proceeded to the rocks, sat down on one of them and baited his hook.

"He'll never catch anything there," declared Piper. "If he does, it won't amount to anything."

"Never mind," said Stone; "it will make him happy to fish."

In the meantime Springer and Crane had paddled well out upon the lake, and presently they turned back toward Pleasant Point. Approaching the camp, they stared at the Dutch boy, who had dropped his baited hook into the water and then serenely fallen sound asleep. There he sat, the rod drooping, his fat chin on his breast, snoring distinctly.

"Look at that!" said Phil, as they silently

swept near. "He must sus-sleep pretty near all the time."

"By Jinks!" chuckled Sile. "He'd wake up pretty sudden if he was to fall in."

They landed in the sandy cove and hastened to call the attention of the others to the snoozing fisherman.

"We know it," laughed Grant. "I rather wish he'd get an eel on now. He's right scared of eels."

"Oh, is he, hey?" snickered Crane. "Well, mebbe I can pervide an eel for him. Jest wait, fellers."

Over to the marshy shore he hastened, where, after some searching, he got hold of the end of a root and tore it out of the muddy ground. With this pliable, slimy root, which was nearly five feet in length, Crane hastened to get into the canoe and push off. Expectantly the others watched Sile paddle round the point and get close to Duckelstein's dangling line. Without awakening Carl, the joker drew up the line and tied it fast to one end of the root, which he then let down into the water. In a few moments he

was back on shore with his chuckling, expectant companions.

"Naow," he said, "jest yeou watch me wake him up."

Silently he sneaked up behind the sleeper, reached over, got the line in his fingers, and made a loop, which he slipped over the reel-handle so that it would not run out. Then he grabbed Carl by the shoulder and yelled into his ear:

"Wake up! Yeou've got a bite! Yank him in!"

Carl awoke and gave a mighty yank with the rod, which, fortunately, did not break beneath the strain. Out of the water sprang the old root, seeming to writhe and squirm in a most lifelike manner. Straight at the angler the thing came, striking him in the face and whipping its cold, clammy folds around his neck.

CHAPTER X.

AN EXPERIMENT WITH FLAPJACKS.

A wild yell of terror burst from the lips of the horrified Dutch boy, who flung himself backward upon the flat rock, kicking, flopping and clawing at the slippery, clinging root.

"Eels!" he yelled chokingly. "Hellup! Took him off quervick! Safe me, pefore I vas dead already!"

The spectators were convulsed with laughter, and Springer, clinging to his sides, collapsed upon the ground.

"Oh! oh!" gasped Phil. "Did you ever see anything so funny? It will kill me!"

"It vill kill *me* uf you don't took him avay!" screamed Carl, tearing frantically at the entwined root, his eyes seeming ready to pop from his head. "An eel hass got me! Hellup!"

Even Stone was shaken by laughter.

"Vot vas der matter?" wailed the floundering

Dutch boy. "Vhy didt you not assistance gif me? Pimepy I vill pite dot eel, undt it vill poison me!"

After a time he succeeded in tearing the root away and flinging it aside, following which he rolled over and over to escape from the thing he feared so much. The whole affair was intensely ludicrous.

Trembling and panting, Carl got upon his feet and ran a short distance, only to trip and fall with a crash that brought a puffing grunt from his lips.

"It seems too bad," said Stone; "but, still, I can't help laughing."

"Oh, yah!" raged the frightened lad, sitting up and glaring at Ben. "It peen funny to see an eels choke somepody plack undt plue, ain't it? Go ahead undt laugh your sides split."

"Why, that thing wouldn't hurt you, Carl," said Grant, advancing and wiping his eyes, for excessive laughter had brought the tears. "It don't look to me like an eel."

"Iss dot so!" sneered Duckelstein scornfully. "Maype you supposition it vas a catfish? Maype

you peliefe it peen a whales? I pet you I know an eels vhen he sees me, undt uf dot vas not an eels I vill alife svallow it."

The Texan lifted the rod with the long root dangling at the end of the line, causing Carl to scramble away still further and once more get upon his stubby legs, prepared to run.

"It's not an eel at all," said Rod; "it's nothing but an old root that must have caught upon your line in some manner."

"Vot?" squawked the Dutch boy, staring incredulously at the thing. "It peen a roots? Vot iss? It couldt not peen a roots, for didt I not feel him aroundt my neck viggle undt choke me almost der vind out of? Keep avay!" he howled, as Rod started to advance. "Perhaps it didt like a root look, but an eels can tell me efery time."

"Look here," invited Rodney, taking the thing in his hands and detaching it from the line. "I tell you it's nothing but an old root."

Even then Duckelstein found it almost impossible to believe the evidence of his eyes. Chagrined, he finally said:

"Vale, dot peen der first time I efer knew a

hook to pite a roots. It vas a most singular concurrence."

"You see now," said Stone, attempting to appear quite grave, "why we laughed and didn't go to your assistance."

"Didt you knew all der time it peen a roots?" questioned Carl a bit suspiciously.

"Yes, we knew it all the time."

"Vale, uf dot vas der case, I vill again say dot it peen a strange concurrence, and I didt not understood him. I couldt not comprehension how dot root came on my line caught."

"That's the most natteral thing in the world," said Crane. "Yeou went to snoozin' and let your line sink to the bottom. The old root was down there and got ketched on it."

"Maype dot vas so," admitted Carl, although his suspicions were plainly unallayed; "but der bottom of der vater off der rocks vas nothings but gravel undt sand, undt I couldt not imachine vot made dot roots svim there."

"He's on to you," whispered Piper in Crane's ear. "Beware of the hour of vengeance."

"Vhy didt you not out loud say it?" demanded

Duckelstein, giving Piper a look. "Vhy didt you vhisper dot fashions? I oxpect you haf enchoyed a great deal uf fun mit me already soon. Maype sometimes der laugh vill out come der other side your mouth of. I vill now home go."

Overflowing with resentment, he started toward the old white horse, which, with head drooping and eyes closed, seemed, like Carl, to have the sleeping habit.

"Don't hike away mad in that fashion," entreated Grant, following. "You won't forget the stuff you're to bring us every morning, will you?"

"Oh, no," assured Carl, "I vill not let it forget me. I vill aroundt come, as agreement, undt maype you vill some more fun haf py me—undt maype you von't."

Grasping the horse's bit, he compelled the animal to back the heavy wagon round so that he might drive away. Climbing upon the wagon, he picked up the reins, but turned for a moment before departing to say:

"You vant to out look for dot gouger. If dot gouger shouldt aroundt come der night in, he

might pite you." Then he gave the reins a slap, chirped to the ancient nag and started.

"May I be eternally chawed up!" rasped Sleuth, glaring at Carl's receding back. "Is it possible the fellow knows something about my terrible experience last night? He hauled our dunnage over here. You don't suppose he found a way to plant those confounded ants in my sleeping bag, do you, comrades? If I thought so, I would unhesitatingly shed his gore."

Springer choked and coughed in the attempt to suppress another shout of laughter, while Crane, with admirable soberness, made answer to Piper:

"I really don't see haow he could have faound the chance, Sleuthy. Yeou've got jest as much reason to suspect that I done it myself, and yeou know there wa'n't no chance for that. I tell yeou them sleepin' bags always become infested if they ain't used reg'ler."

"It will be a long time before I use one again, regular or irregular," asserted Piper. "I've had my lesson." The manner in which he uttered

these words made it impossible for Sile, even, to keep his face straight.

"As I once before remarked," observed Grant, "I don't reckon Carl Duckelstein is quite as sleepy as he looks. It was plenty plain that he suspected us of putting up that joke on him."

After laughing and chatting a while longer, they became aware that it was midday and time for dinner.

"I'm hungry again," announced Sleuth; "and even taking up a hole in my belt, after the manner of the bold pioneers of other days, will not satisfy me. What are we to have for rations?"

"Perhaps the cuc-cook will suggest something," said Springer, looking at Stone.

"I've told you before," reminded Ben, "that I'm a mighty poor cook."

This brought a chorus of remonstrance from the others, and Grant remarked:

"I reckon you're the best cook in the bunch, and we can stand it if you can. Our bread must be running low. Can you make bread?"

"Or flapjacks?" cried Sile. "Them's the things, flapjacks. We brought along a can of

molasses, and if yeou can knock together some flapjacks, Ben, it'll fix us all right."

"The kind I'd make would be likely to fix you," agreed Stone. "Still, I've seen my mother make them, and I'm willing to try."

That was enough, and, encouraged by his mates, he set about the task. First he measured out a quart of flour, into which he rubbed dry about two tablespoonfuls of lard, adding a teaspoonful of salt, two of baking powder and two of sugar, the latter to make the flapjacks brown. With the addition of cold water and the vigorous use of a spoon he produced a thin batter.

In the meantime a hot fire had been built beneath the sheet-iron stove top and the frying pan placed upon one of the uncovered holes. When the pan was well heated Stone greased it with a piece of fat pork that sizzled and spluttered.

"Now," he said, as the boys, having set the table, gathered around to watch him, "we'll soon find out what sort of things they will be."

"I'm willing to take a ch-chance, anyhow," declared Springer courageously.

"Starving men in the wilderness have been

known to subsist on old moccasins," said Piper, licking his lips. "Your flapjacks can't be much worse, Ben."

"I should hope not," said the cook, using the big spoon to ladle some of the batter into the frying pan. "You fellows better get ready to tackle them as they come hot from the skillet."

"I'm going to watch," said Sleuth, squatting near, the heat of the fire having caused the perspiration to start out on his face. "It's well that all adventurous characters who explore wild and unknown lands should have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the culinary art."

With repeated dips of the spoon Stone had poured enough batter to fill the hot pan within half an inch of the rim, and this he now watched closely as it began to cook. As soon as the cake was full of bubbles and the edges had begun to stiffen, he lifted the pan and shook it with a rotary movement, which set the big flapjack free.

"Are you going to flip it?" questioned Sleuth eagerly. "They always flip 'em, don't they?"

"I'm going to try it," said Ben, holding the pan slantingly away from his body. "Look out."

He gave a toss and a flip, and the hot cake sailed into the air. In vain he sought to catch it, and in vain Piper dodged.

"The flapjack hit Sleuth fairly in the left eye, and he fell over upon his back with a howl of dismay."

Naturally, this incident was productive of considerable merriment, in which, however, the victim failed to join.

"Enjoy yourselves!" rasped Sleuth, gazing ruefully at the lost flapjack as it lay on the ground. "Laugh, while I perish of hunger, you heartless brutes! Say, Ben, don't try to flip the next one; turn it with a knife or something. And please hurry up, or in the throes of famine I'll eat that half-cooked thing that soaked me in the blinker."

Stone, however, persisted in the attempt to flip the flapjacks, and, having learned something through his first failure, succeeded quite well with the next cake, although Piper took care to keep well out of range. Having caught the knack, the cook furnished flapjacks as fast as the fire would brown them, and, urged by him,

the boys began devouring them almost as rapidly as they came to the table. Adrip with molasses, they were not so bad, either.

"I've sus-seen worse," said Springer.

"Where?" laughed Ben.

"In the dictionary," replied Phil, lifting a dripping piece to his mouth.

"Come on, Stoney," urged Crane. "Don't yeou dast to try 'em? Ain't yeou goin' to eat any?"

"When the rest of you begin to falter," said Ben, as he watched another one browning, "I'll take a venture. If they prove fatal we'll all perish together."

Far from proving fatal, however, they fully satisfied the hunger of those vigorous boys, whose healthy digestions gave them not a single pang. The last morsel was cleaned up, and Stone was universally acclaimed as a wonderful cook.

"I reckon that settles it," said Grant, when he had finished. "You've got your job cut out for you during this outing, Ben, and I shall vote that you be given full charge of the commissary department."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LEGEND OF LOVERS' LEAP.

An hour or more after dinner, as the boys were lounging about, a canoe containing a single occupant was seen approaching the point. The person who wielded the paddle headed for the sandy beach of the little cove, upon which lay the canoe of the campers, and, as he drew near, he was seen to be a youngish man dressed in khaki. A bamboo fishing rod projected upward over one of the thwarts of the stranger's canoe.

"I judge he's coming to pay us a visit," said Grant, starting toward the beach.

Rod was right. Smiling pleasantly, the young man, who had a small black moustache and seemed somewhat in need of a shave, brought his canoe on to the beach with a soft grating sound and stepped out into the shallow water, his feet being protected by water-tight boots.

"Hello," he nodded in an agreeable manner.

"Saw your smoke and thought I'd come over. Camping out here, I see."

"Yes," answered Rod, equally affable and a bit curious. "Are you from the hotel?"

"No. My name is Granger—Charles Granger, and I'm stopping in an old log cabin about two miles from the hotel. How's the fishing over this way?"

"Pretty good, I reckon. We've tried it only once, but we had good luck. You see we got here last night barely soon enough to make camp."

"I didn't think you'd been here long," said Granger, "for if you had I'd been likely to have seen you before. How long do you plan to stay?"

"A week or so; perhaps two; if everything goes all right. My name is Grant. Won't you come up and meet the rest of the fellows?"

"Sure," beamed Granger; "I'd like to."

He followed Rod, who presented him to the others. Apparently he was a languid sort of a chap with a dreamy eye, and, for all of his seeming frankness, it was not long before the boys fancied they could perceive something mysterious in his manner. He told them he was occupy-

ing the old log cabin quite alone, his doctor having advised him to spend as much of the summer as possible in the open air. Nevertheless, although he was somewhat slender of build, he did not have the appearance of a person in poor health. Springer, seeking to draw him out, soon discovered that he knew very little about fishing and fishing tackle.

"Oh, I'm a greenhorn," laughed Granger; "but I enjoy the sport just the same. It's about all I have to do besides read, and a man gets tired of reading after a while. I have amused myself, however, by picking up some information concerning the legends hereabouts. You know this is really a most romantic spot, as well as one of the prettiest sheets of water to be found in all New England. If people looking for a summer's outing just knew about it, they'd pack the Cliff House over there until it would be necessary to build an addition."

"The lake would soon be spoiled if rusticators overran it," was Grant's opinion.

"Oh, I don't know about that," retorted the visitor. "In one way, perhaps you're right, but

it would mean tremendous business and a lot of money for the hotel people. They took a big chance when they put up that house over there and sunk so much money in it. You see there's a certain disadvantage in the fact that they're so far from the nearest railroad point, although to many people that would seem like an advantage. The first two years they lost money hand over fist, although they advertised extensively in the regular manner. This is the first season that they have really done a fair sort of business, and I understand the business is increasing."

"You sus-seem to be interested in the hotel," said Springer.

"Oh, not at all, not at all," returned Granger. "I'm simply telling you what I've heard, and it's by the way of gossip, you know. We must have something to talk about."

"Sir," said Piper, "I reckon maybe you'll pardon me if I inform you that we're not much interested in the affairs of other people who have rashly ventured into the remote regions of these virgin wilds. It is only their ignorance or their foolish bravado that has led them thus to expose

their lives to the perils of the primeval forests, and were the Wampanoags to take to the war-path, it is not at all improbable that the foolhardy palefaces over yonder would be butchered to the last man, woman and child."

Mr. Granger looked at Sleuth in a puzzled way.

"What's he talking about?" he asked.

"Injuns!" hissed Piper, unabashed. "We pioneers know full well the perils that menace us in this redskin haunted land, but years of experience amid such dangers have taught us to baffle the varmints. Those who lack our knowledge should cling close to the settlements, where they may seek the protection of the block houses whenever the pizen warriors go on a rampage."

The visitor turned from Sleuth to Grant. "Anything the matter with him up here?" he asked, touching his forehead.

"Nothing but illuminated literature," answered Rod, laughing. "At home Piper has Sherlock Holmes and Old Sleuth backed against the ropes, and groggy. He's the greatest detective that ever solved the mystery of a dark and terrible crime. Here in the woods he is the emu-

lator of Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton and 'Dead-eye Dick, the Boy Scout of the Border.' That's all."

"Oh, I see," laughed Granger. "It's the effect of a vivid imagination, spurred by a line of reading that some fussy people call pernicious. I fancy he'll get over it in time and be none the worse for it."

Which caused Sleuth to snort disgustedly.

"Speaking of Indians," pursued the visitors, "I suppose you've heard the story of Lovers' Leap? That's the cliff over behind the hotel, the top of which is marked by that white cross which you can faintly discern against the sky."

"Well," replied Crane, "we've heard something abaout it."

"It's a most romantic legend," said Granger glibly. "In the days before the invading whites drove them out, two small, warlike tribes of Indians, the Passagonquays and the Mattagamons, were almost constantly at war over this particular territory, which was coveted by both. Even in times of peace these tribes had little in common and shunned each other as far as possible. Ac-

cording to the story, Lolokana was a beautiful princess of the Passagonquays, and Agamenthan, a young brave of that tribe, desired her to brighten his wigwam. But, for some reason, Lolokana had no use for Agamenthan and steadily repulsed his wooing. One day while Lolokana wandered alone in the forest she was attacked by a panther."

"Who says there are no cougars hereabouts?" muttered Piper.

"The princess would have been slain," continued the narrator, "only for the prompt and fortunate appearance of a tall, handsome young brave, who rushed to her rescue and slew the panther with his knife. The young Indian was wounded, but not seriously. His name was Woganock, and he was a Mattagamon. Nevertheless, in spite of the hostility between the two tribes, Lolokana promptly fell in love with Woganock. Of course they knew their love-making would not meet with the sanction of their people, and therefore it was carried on in secret through clandestine meetings in the woods.

"But Agamenthan was keeping a jealous and

watchful eye upon Lolokana, and one day he followed her and saw the lovers meet in the forest. Without hesitation he rushed upon Woganock, shouting for him to defend himself. Armed only with their knives, the two young braves fought a bloody battle, in which both were badly chopped up. Woganock conquered, however, and Agamenthan was left apparently dying upon the ground.

"Supported and aided by Lolokana, Woganock, though desperately wounded, made his way back to his tribe. But when he told the story of the battle and confessed his love for Lolokana his father, a chief, rose in wrath and drove the princess away, vowing that no Passagonquay should ever take a Mattagamon for his squaw. Weak and helpless, Woganock could not lift a hand in remonstrance, and doubtless it would have availed him little had he been able to do so.

"Lolokana returned to her people and learned, to her astonishment, that Agamenthan had been found by some warriors, who had bound up his injuries and brought him back, alive, to the village. He must have been a tough one, this red-

skin, for he did not die. However, he told the story of the duel with Woganock, and thenceforth Lolokana was held practically a captive by her father, who promised Agamenthan that she should become his squaw. When the wounded brave recovered his strength and health he was to have her, whether she wished it or not.

"Now, as it affects every girl of spirit, this attempt to coerce her against her will made Lolokana only the more determined that she would never belong to Agamenthan. If she had lost Woganock, if she was to see him no more this side of the Happy Hunting Grounds, she was resolved that she would die the squaw of no man. A prisoner, watched vigilantly by night and by day, she dreamed splendid dreams of a reunion with the lover who had saved her from the panther and defeated the warlike Agamenthan in a fair and even battle. For, even as she had been driven away by the angry Mattagamons, although he could make no effort to shield her and could scarcely whisper a remonstrance, Woganock had cast her a look from his dark eyes that was a pledge and a promise. So she waited for

him to come, confident that sometime he would do so and take her away.

"At last, however, she began to fear that she had waited in vain, for Agamenthan, bearing many terrible scars upon his person, had recovered his strength and was asking of her father that the time should be set when he could lead her to his wigwam. Though she knew of these councils and of the impatience of the young brave, Lolokana kept her lips sealed—kept her dark lashes always lowered, that Agamenthan might not read in her eyes the resolve to die rather than submit. A knife, which she had found, was hidden upon her person, and this, if nothing else, would enable her to escape at the last moment. One strong, swift thrust deep into her bosom would set her free.

"At last the day was named, and the chief of the Passagonquays told his daughter that on the morrow she was to become the squaw of Agamenthan. That night she did not close her eyes in sleep, although, lying quite still, without a single movement to arouse suspicion, she led her vigilant guard to believe she slumbered. It was

her purpose to try to creep forth from the teepee in the darkest hours and take flight.

"As she lay thus she heard something—the faintest rustle, like the movements of a toad in the leaves; yet something told her it was not a toad, and, with her heart pounding, she listened and listened. Presently she heard her name whispered almost in her ear, and she knew it had been breathed by the lips of Woganock. She knew her lover had come at last. With all the skill and stealth of his race he had crept into the village, not even disturbing a sleeping dog. He was outside the teepee; only the thin wall divided them.

"Lulled by her apparent submission to the decree of her father, the chief, the guard dozed. Woganock's hands found his throat and strangled him with scarcely a sound. Then, with the same caution, he led Lolokana out of the village and away into the black depths of the forest.

"What had happened was not discovered by the Passagonquays until morning dawned. Then, as you may believe, there was something doing.

The old chief called upon Agamenthan to bring the princess back, and Agamenthan promised to do so. With a dozen young warriors at his heels, he took up the trail. Three days and three nights they pursued the fleeing lovers with the tenacity of bloodhounds. Early on the fourth day the pursuers closed in upon Woganock and Lolokana, for the princess was weary. The moccasins were gone from her bleeding feet, and even Woganock's great strength had been terribly taxed through bearing the maiden in his arms over many of the rough places. They were trapped in the mountains yonder. No matter which way they sought to flee, they found themselves cut off, and eventually, with the pursuers closing in, they were driven out upon the very brink of that great cliff where the cross now stands. They could not descend, and to turn back into the forest from which they had come meant nothing save final capture, even though they were to slip through the cordon of pursuers.

"There upon the cliff, with half his followers at his heels, Agamenthan found them. His eyes

blazing with triumph, the Passagonquay advanced, shouting exultantly that this time the dog of a Mattagamon should surely die.

"With their hands clasped, Woganock and Lolokana looked into each other's eyes and spoke a few low words. When Agamenthan was less than forty feet distant Woganock laughed at him and cried, 'Fool! idiot! warrior with the heart of a rabbit! spawn of a crawling snake! creature that I have conquered and spit upon! if you would take Lolokana from me, follow.'

"In a twinkling he had caught the princess up in his arms, and her arms were around his neck. In another twinkling, before the eyes of the horrified Agamenthan, he leaped far out from the brink of the precipice. No sound, no cry did the lovers make as they fell. Even the ragged rocks at the foot of the cliff could not tear them apart. They were found among those rocks, dead, but still locked fast in each other's arms.

"That's the legend of Lovers' Leap. The hotel people have put up the cross to mark the spot from which Woganock sprang. There is a path,

passing round the cliff, which may be climbed by anyone who wishes to visit the cross and has the energy and perseverance. Each day several of the guests at the hotel climb that path."

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF THE HERMIT.

The boys had listened with deep interest to this story, told by Granger in a manner which seemed to indicate that he had it well by heart. After the tale was ended there was silence for a moment or two, broken by Piper, who observed with no small amount of sarcasm:

"Talk about imagination! I call that going some! Who ever polished up that gem of a yarn certainly put in some fancy touches."

"The story is said to be true," said the visitor, with a touch of warmth.

"Perhaps it is," returned Sleuth; "as true as the illuminated fiction someone politely sneered at a short time ago. If I had read it in a book, I'd taken it for just what it doubtless is, pure romance. To romance I have no objection whatever, but I certainly hate for anyone to try to cram it down my throat as truth."

"Evidently you're a doubting Thomas," said the narrator of the legend, who was greatly surprised that, of them all, Piper should be the one promptly to brand the tale as fiction.

"No," said Sleuth, "I'm a doubting William; Billy is my first name. It's scarcely necessary for me to bring my penetrating and deductive faculties to bear upon that yarn in order to point out the ragged holes with which it is riddled. Who recorded this wonderful legend? Who knew all about the very thoughts of the beautiful Indian princess as she lay a captive in the lodge of the great war chief, her father? I haven't anywhere read that the North American Indians could record things by any other method than that of picture writing of the crudest sort. And the old guy of a brave who recorded *thoughts* in that manner would be obliged to hump himself some. I wonder who faked up that yarn?"

"You seem inclined to take everything too literally," said Granger, seeking to repress his resentment over Sleuth's attitude. "Perhaps it has been touched up a bit and filled out in com-

plete narrative form, but doubtless, in the main, the story is true."

But Billy shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows significantly.

"It makes little difference whether *you* believe the story or not," said the annoyed visitor. "A great many people do believe it."

"There are always suckers ready to swallow anything," retorted Sleuth. "Why, I suppose there are some people who actually believe this lake, or that island out yonder, in particular, to be haunted."

A queer look passed over Granger's face, and for a few moments he scrutinized Piper in a perplexed manner. At first he had imagined that of the young campers this lad would be the most ready and eager to accept such fanciful tales as truthful, or as containing a certain amount of truth, at least. It now seemed that this sentimental, imaginative boy was the most skeptical fellow among them.

"You may believe as much as you like," he finally said; "or as little; it makes no difference

to me. The story of Lovers' Leap, as a story, sounds very well."

"And you tell it fluently," murmured Piper.

Disdaining this remark, Granger went on.

"As for the other matter, it is scarcely strange that some superstitious people should fancy the lake haunted. I believe it got its name in the first place through the tale that regularly, once a year, upon the anniversary of the tragedy, the spirits of the Indian lovers appear upon the cliff, from which they leaped, clasped in each other's arms."

Sleuth smothered a snicker, upon which, unable longer to keep still, Crane, who had been deeply absorbed in the legend as related, turned upon him savagely, snapping:

"What's the matter with yeou, anyhaow? Can't yeou be half perlite if yeou try? Yeou don't haf to listen; yeou can go off somewhere all by your lonesome."

The visitor flashed Sile a glance of thanks.

"There's another reason," he stated, "why the lake is supposed to be haunted. Almost everyone around here has heard the story of Old Lonely,

the hermit whose deserted hut still stands on Spirit Island."

"Yep," nodded Crane eagerly, "I know abaout that yarn."

"Perhaps the rest of us have never heard it in full," said Grant. "I'm right sure I haven't."

It immediately became apparent that Granger was fully as ready to tell this story as he had been to relate the Indian legend.

"In midwinter some ten years ago," he began, "it was reported that there was an old man living on Spirit Island. First his smoke was seen rising from the island, and then some men who came here to fish through the ice saw the recluse himself. Their curiosity aroused by the sight of the smoke, they approached the island. But when they drew near a bearded, bare-headed man in tattered garments appeared on the shore with a gun in his hands and a growling dog at his heels, and ordered them away. They attempted to talk with him, but, save to warn them of personal violence if they persisted in intruding, he would make no conversation. All that winter he remained on the island, seen at rare intervals,

though the ringing of his axe and the report of his gun were sometimes heard. Naturally, people wondered who the stranger could be, and when the spring fishing came on some sportsmen made a second attempt to land on the island.

"Again the hermit made his appearance with the vicious looking dog as his companion, and warned them to keep off. They attempted to parley with him, but the effort was discouraged, as that of the winter fishermen had been.

"For almost five years Old Lonely, as he was dubbed for want of another name, lived there with his dog on Spirit Island. Two or three times a year, silent and unapproachable, he appeared in Pemstock and bought certain absolutely necessary essentials of life that could be obtained in no other manner. Clothing, ammunition for his gun, fishing tackle, a little hardware and a few simple cooking utensils, together with salt, sugar, coffee, flour and tobacco made up, in the main, all of his purchases, which were paid for with spot cash. Where he got it no one could surmise, but the hermit always seemed to have enough money in his pocket to pay for

what he bought. He engaged a man regularly to deliver the stuff at the foot of the lake, where Old Lonely received it, loaded it into his crude flat-bottomed boat and rowed away.

"Upon every occasion when seen he was accompanied by his dog, a snarling, tooth-threatening creature, who seemed even less friendly toward human beings in general than did his master. There were fake stories and surmises afloat concerning the hermit of Spirit Island, but none of these hints or tales when followed up seemed to have any real foundation of truth. All were apparently the figments of some speculative or imaginative mind."

At this point Piper smothered a cough, but the narrator did not even glance in Sleuth's direction. Absorbed in the story he was relating, he continued without a break.

"Naturally, some of these speculative ones were inclined to picture Old Lonely as having a dark and terrible past. Others said he was a man who had been betrayed by a friend and deserted by his wife. The latter declared that, having watched him when he came into Pemstock,

they had observed that he always turned his eyes away whenever a woman drew near. At any rate, living that lonely life, the man swiftly aged. When first seen there had been no sign of gray in his long hair or his ragged beard, but soon the white began to show, and on his last visit to town both hair and beard would have been almost snowy white only for the fact that they seemed soiled and dirty through the general negligence which marked his entire person. His clothing he wore patched again and again, until it almost dropped from his body.

"Once, having watched the island a long time and finally seen Old Lonely leave it in his boat, two men went on and saw his crude clay-chinked log hut; but, fearing his return and believing he might make good his threat to shoot any who trespassed, they did not linger long.

"Late in the autumn, something like five years ago, some hunters heard Old Lonely's dog howling dolefully on Spirit Island. The howling continued for two full days, although it grew less frequent in its outbreaks and seemed to become weaker, as if the dog was losing strength. And

during those two days not a sign of smoke was perceived rising from the island. That something had happened to Old Lonely became the conviction of the hunters, but the man's reputation prevented them from making haste to investigate. Finally, however, they ventured to put out and land upon the island. The hermit did not put in an appearance to oppose them.

"Approaching the hut by way of a path made by the feet of the recluse, they beheld the door standing ajar. About the dismal place there was a silence and desolation that bespoke tragedy. When they peered in at the door two gleaming eyes met their gaze, and the warning snarl of a dog greeted their ears. In that inner gloom they saw the animal, gaunt and weak, lift itself upon its trembling legs to stand glaring at them, its teeth exposed. More than that, upon a dirty bunk they perceived the silent figure of Old Lonely, his ghastly, stony face framed in a tangle of white hair and whiskers. They called to him repeatedly, but he did not answer and he made no move. Then they knew he was dead.

"The dog, however, weak and starving though

he was, would not let them enter the hut, and finally, in order to perform what they believed to be their duty to the dead, they shot the creature. In its dying throes it howled once in such a terrible manner that the listeners shuddered and turned cold."

"Ge wilikens!" breathed Crane. "I've heard the story before, but yeou sartainly can put in the fancy touches and thrills."

"The dog," pursued Granger, "was buried on the island. The body of Old Lonely was taken to the pauper's plot in Pemstock cemetery. In an old leather pocketbook upon the hermit's person were found some newspaper clippings and other papers, which revealed the identity of the man. In that pocketbook there was also a small, faded photograph of a woman, and this, it was eventually learned, was the likeness of the hermit's wife. Old Lonely's true name was John Calvert. Years before, in a distant state, he had plundered a bank, for which crime he had been arrested, tried, convicted and sent to prison for twenty years. Within twelve months of his conviction his wife died of a broken heart. How he

secured a picture of her after breaking prison, as he eventually did, can only be surmised.

"As an escaped convict he was hunted relentlessly, until the body of a man believed to be that of John Calvert was cast ashore by the waters of Lake Michigan. Thinking the bank looter and prison breaker dead, the authorities quite naturally gave over the hunt. How he came to Spirit Island and why he chose to make his home there for the remainder of his desolate days is likewise a matter of speculation.

"And now comes the strange, and, doubtless you will say, the improbable, part of the story. The island is said to be haunted by the ghosts of Old Lonely and his dog. Venturesome ones, entertaining the belief that Calvert had, ere his arrest, hidden a portion of his plunder, which he recovered after escaping from prison, have searched for the loot on Spirit Island, and half a hundred holes that they have dug in the ground may be seen by anyone who cares to take the trouble and has the courage to do so."

"Courage!" scoffed Piper, with a laugh,

"Who's afraid? Of course no sensible person believes the island is really haunted."

Granger smiled. "You're a brave young chap, I preceive," he said sarcastically. "I don't presume you fear ghosts or anything else?"

"Nothing but cuc-cougars," chuckled Phil Springer. "Brave as he is, Sleuthy has a certain amount of respect for cuc-cougars."

"I'm not advertising myself as one who believes in spooks," smiled the entertaining visitor; "but, nevertheless, even though you may feel inclined to ridicule me, I will say that I've seen and heard some strange things around Spirit Island, and I'm not the only one, either. Many people have seen vanishing lights flashing there at night. They have heard the weird howling of a dog. They've even seen white, ghostly figures upon the shores of the island. When Calvert's body was found a small eight day clock sat ticking upon a shelf above the man's bunk, and some of the loot hunters, venturing by day into that desolate hut, have vowed that they plainly heard the ticking of a clock coming from some unknown place. They have likewise heard strange

tappings, like the knocking of ghostly fingers. Every little while people from the hotel visit the island, but they always do so in numbers, and it would be a nervy person who would go there alone, especially at night. Perhaps our brave friend, the doubter, would not hesitate to make such a visit, even after nightfall."

The bare idea, however, was enough to cause the other boys to laugh heartily, whereupon Piper rose to his feet, crying:

"I'm not chump enough to go prowling around anywhere alone at night; but I'll tell you what, I'd just like to visit that old island in the daytime, and I don't take any stock in this fine, well polished ghost story."

CHAPTER XIII.

QUEER SLEUTH.

The visitor also rose to his feet, repressing admirably such annoyance as he may have felt.

"I've simply given you the story as I've heard it," he said. "That it's true in the main there is sufficient evidence to prove. As to the matter of the island being haunted, I will reiterate that I have seen flashing lights upon it at night, and once or twice I've heard the howling of a dog, which seemed to come from the island itself. I think you'll all admit that the story is interesting, at least."

"It sure is," agreed Grant, "and we're much obliged to you for telling it. It ought to make a right good newspaper yarn."

Granger nodded. "It has appeared in several newspapers this year."

"The newspapers will print anything," said Piper.

The visitor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, boys," he said, "I think I'll be going. I hope you enjoy yourselves and have plenty of sport. Perhaps I'll see you again."

"Cuc-come over any time," Springer hastened to invite. "You've helped liven up a rather hot and dull afternoon."

"Yes, come again," said Stone.

"Perhaps," suggested Grant, "after we've been here a while we might be able to put you wise to the good fishing places. Our friend, Piper, although he hasn't yet tried his hand at it, is a right wonderful angler."

"When the fish hear that he's araound," grinned Crane, "they crawl right aout on dry land and hide themselves."

"Funny, hey?" snapped Sleuth. "Good joke! Ha! ha!"

Somehow, this seemed to amuse Mr. Granger greatly, for he continued to laugh as he made his way toward his canoe. Piper glared at the young man's back and muttered; unlike the others, he did not go down to the shore to see the visitor off.

"Queer chap, that chum of yours, boys," said Granger, ere getting into the canoe. "Anything wrong with him in his garret?"

"Nothing except the sus-stuff he reads," answered Springer. "Some folks might think Sleuthy a bit queer, but he's no fool, as he's demonstrated more than once."

"I should say not," agreed Stone. "I surely have reasons to feel mighty grateful toward Piper. Naturally, people laugh at him on account of his poses in imitation of the great detectives of fiction; but less than a year ago, when I was arrested on a false charge, he turned the laugh and materially aided in clearing me through some genuine detective work that was really clever."

"I can hardly believe such a thing possible," murmured Granger.

"It's a fact," asserted Ben.

"And I'll swear to it," supported Phil, "for I was in the courtroom when he told his sus-story that upset the case against you and astonished everybody who heard it. Sleuth may be queer, but it's a fact that he's no fuf-fool."

"Well, so long, boys," said Granger, pushing off and dipping his paddle into the water.

They watched until he was some distance away, heading for the further shore to the south of the hotel.

"A right agreeable chap," commented Grant, "though he didn't seem inclined to tell a heap about himself."

"He was too busy telling us about Lovers' Leap and the old hermit," said Stone, as they made their way toward the shade in the vicinity of the tent. "Those yarns were very interesting and very well told."

"That's a fact," agreed Piper, "and that's the reason why the brand of fiction was so plain upon them."

"Naow yeou look here, Sleuthy," cried Crane. "Mebbe there ain't no proofs to back up the Injun story, but everybody knows the principal features of the other yarn are true. The old hermit did live on Spirit Island, and after he was faound dead folks said there was evidence to show that he was an escaped convict."

"That much may possibly be true," admitted

Piper, with evident reluctance; "but think of claiming that the spirits of the Indian lovers appear on the cliff once a year and leap off clasped in each other's arms! Piffle! And all that stuff about the ticking of an unseen clock in the hermit's hut, and mysterious rappings, and ghostly lights, and the howling of a dog, and white figures seen vaguely on the island! Bah! Rot!" With those final explosive ejaculations he burned the brand of condemnation upon such preposterous moonshine.

"Oh, of course we didn't really believe them things," protested Crane, although his manner seemed to indicate that he would have found a certain amount of satisfaction in believing them.

"You must recall," said Grant, "that Granger did not make the assertion that such things really happened; he simply claimed that some people believed or told that they happened."

"No, sir," denied Piper promptly; "he declared that he himself had seen mysterious lights on the island, and had likewise heard the doleful howling of a dog. I'll admit that he was clever in avoiding assertions that might be disproved by

investigation or the light of reason's torch, which must illuminate the minds of all intelligent men; but, nevertheless, in a subtle, crafty manner, he sought by every possible device to inveigle us into accepting as truth the fanciful chimeras of his, or some other person's, imaginative mind."

"Oh, wow!" whooped Sile. "Yeou hit the English language an awful wallop that time. Yeou had the dictionary backed up against the ropes and gaspin'."

"Nobody's eager to swallow it all, Pipe," said Grant. "All the same, I'll admit that Mr. Granger has made me curious to pay a visit to Spirit Island. I'd like to see the holes people have dug searching for the loot John Calvert is supposed to have buried there."

"Me, too," nodded Crane. "It's too hot to paddle araound much naow, but we'll have to go over to the island fust chance we get."

"I wouldn't mind that myself," said Sleuth. "It will give us something to do."

"You've got sus-something to do," reminded Springer, unless you want to sleep on a mighty

hard bed tonight. Why don't you cut some boughs?"

"Seems to me," returned Sleuth, "you fellows cut enough yesterday. You might give me some of your boughs."

"Not on yeour life, you lazy tyke!" returned Crane. "If yeou want boughs you'll cut 'em."

"Oh, all right," snapped Piper. "Where's the hatchet? I'll do it now." He found the hatchet and stalked away into the woods in search of boughs.

"Queer old Sleuthy," laughed Springer, as they heard him chopping a short distance from the camp. "I'm glad he came along with us, for he's certainly provided some amusement."

After a time Piper reappeared with an armful of boughs, dripping perspiration from every pore and looking weary and disgusted. He would have flung the boughs down carelessly in the tent, but Grant compelled him to put them in the proper place and arrange them for his bed.

"I never dreamed camping out was such hard work," grumbled Sleuth.

"Work!" returned Rod. "Why, we haven't

worked, any of us; it's nothing but play. Hurry up, Pipe, for we're going in swimming pretty soon."

"And me all hot and reeking like this? Now that's a pretty trick to play on a fellow, get him overheated and then announce that you're going in swimming."

"We'll wait till you cuc-cool off some," promised Springer.

Half an hour later, feeling secure from observation, they stripped off their clothes and went plumping, one after another, into the cool, inviting water off the bold rocks of the point. The delight of it set them tingling and shouting joyously as they disported themselves like porpoises.

"It's great!" cried Crane. "Warm! I never saw the water so warm. Somebody get a white stone. Let's dive."

A white rock twice the size of a hen's egg was found and tossed into the water, and one after another they took turns diving for it, casting it each time, when recovered, a little further from the shore. Grant proved himself the most

expert at this diversion, for he brought up the stone, after all the others had failed to find it, in particularly deep water. In impromptu races, also, the Texan was able to defeat any one of them, although Springer pushed him hard.

"I took swimming lessons at school," he explained. "After a fellow gets so he reckons he can swim about as well as anybody he will usually learn a lot by taking lessons from a good instructor."

They were loath to come out, but presently Rodney urged them to do so, and, after a vigorous rubbing with rough towels, they dressed and found themselves bubbling with fresh vigor, like a lot of young colts.

As the sun declined and the afternoon waned Springer mentioned the fact that the time for evening fishing was approaching.

"We really ought to have two canoes," he said, "so four of us could go out. I suppose it will be a good pup-plan for one of us to be at camp all the time."

Promptly Piper announced:

"I'm going fishing myself tonight, and I'm

going in the canoe, if I have to fight for the chance."

"Dinged if I ain't with ye, Sleuthy," cried Sile. "Rod and Phil had all the fun this morning, and naow it's aour turn."

"But we didn't go fuf-fishing in the canoe," reminded Springer.

"Because you couldn't, that's why," said Sleuth. "It wasn't here."

"We had to foot it along the shore and up that brook, you know," put in Grant.

"But that was fun," snickered Piper. "No work about it; nothing but fun. That's all there is to camping out."

"Look a' here, yeou bold pioneer of the wilderness," said Crane, "if yeou come with me in the canoe yeou don't want to git a notion that I'm goin' to do all the paddlin'. Not on your life. Yeou'll have to do yeour part of it."

"Depend on me, comrade," said Piper promptly. "I'll be with you, even to the death."

So, as the others good-naturedly yielded, it was Piper and Crane who put forth in the canoe with their rods and gear to lure the finny denizens of the lake with artificial flies.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAUNTED ISLAND.

Luck did not seem to favor the anglers, for, though they paddled along the shores, casting into the shadows, and varied this by trying deeper water, the sun had set before they got a single rise. At last, however, there was a swirl as Crane lightly dropped a "Morning Glory" as far as he could send it from the canoe, and the buzz of the reel made the hearts of both lads jump.

"I've got one—by jinks! I've got one," palpitated Sile.

"You haven't got him yet," said Sleuth. "He's hooked, but you can't be sure of him until we dip him into the canoe."

"Ginger! see him go," cried Crane. "He must be a bouncer. Grab the paddle, Pipe, and follow up."

Having reeled in, Sleuth did as directed, and at the first dip of his blade the boys saw the fish

leap clear of the water, with a tremendous slap, as it tried to shake the hook free. With a splash, he fell back and took to running again.

"Shades of the Pilgrim Fathers!" gasped Sleuth in envious admiration. "He's a monster. He's the father of them all. Why didn't I have the luck to hook him?"

"It's a salmon, and a peach," fluttered Crane, reeling in as the fish yielded. "Have that net ready, Pipe."

"No hurry," returned Sleuth wisely. "Don't you get the idea that that fellow is going to let us dip him in a hurry. You've got your work cut out for you for some time, old man."

He was quite right about this, for the gamey fish fought like a shark, resorting to all the devices and stratagems of its kind. Time after time the salmon leaped high out of the water, and whenever it did so both boys were filled with apprehension until the tautening of the line again told them that the creature had not broken away. At least twenty minutes were consumed in the delightful, nerve-racking task of playing that fish, and Crane repeatedly brought him close to

the canoe, only to have him turn and run with a fresh burst of strength and a persistence that threatened to leave the reel bare of line. At last, however, with the soft twilight thickening, the salmon betrayed unmistakable evidence of weariness. Slowly and resentfully it permitted itself to be brought closer, its efforts to run becoming shorter and weaker. Grasping the bamboo handle of the landing net, Piper awaited the proper moment, ready to dip.

"Work easy, Sile—work easy," entreated Piper. "Don't let him fool you. He may be playing possum."

"Jest yeou be ready to do yeour part of the job," advised Crane. "That's all I want of yeou."

To Sleuth's credit, he did his part well, and the very first dip of the net secured the salmon, who came out of the water writhing in the meshes and shining beautifully, despite the semi-darkness.

"Bate he weighs five paounds," exulted the triumphant angler, removing the capture from the net. "Oh, say, Sleuth, what do you think of

that! Them fellers that ketched a little mess of brook traout this morning are beat to death."

Sleuth had nothing to say. He sat there in the bottom of the canoe gazing dejectedly at the beautiful fish, his heart heavy with chagrin because his was not the glory of the capture.

"But there may be others around here," he suddenly exclaimed. "Perhaps I'll get the next one."

"Do you realize that it's dark and we're clean over on the side of the lake opposite aour camp?" asked Sile. "It's too late to fish any more tonight, old feller, and we'd better be hikin' for Pleasant Point."

"That's it!" rasped Sleuth. "That's the way of it! You don't want me to catch anything. You want to hustle back with this big fellow, so that you can crow over me."

"Oh, flumydiddle!" retorted the other boy. "Yeou can see for yourself that it's gettin' too dark, and we've got a long distance to go. The fellers will be worried abaout us if we don't git in pretty soon. Yeou've got some sense; anyway, we told Granger that you had."

Piper yielded with poor grace, and when the canoe was headed toward Pleasant Point there was little vigor in his strokes. He had boasted of his skill as an angler, and, returning empty-handed with a companion crowned with victory, he seemed even now in fancy to hear the jibes of the three lads who were waiting at Camp Oakdale.

Crane made no complaint, even though he realized that the canoe was being propelled almost wholly by his paddle; really generous, although inclined to practical jokes, Sile was sorry for Sleuth.

The rekindled fire was blazing on Pleasant Point, and this light guided them. Presently, near at hand and only a short distance away, a wooded island loomed in the darkness.

"Gee!" said Crane in a suppressed voice. "That's Spirit Island. We're pretty close."

"Yah!" Piper flung back. "You're scared, I'll bet."

"No, I ain't," denied the other boy stoutly. "I didn't take no more stock in the ghost part of Granger's yarn than yeou did, not a bit. Say, if

we had time I'd jest as lief land on that island right naow."

"I dare you!" challenged Sleuth. "Come on."

"But yeou know we ain't got time."

"We can just step ashore for a minute, and then we'll have the satisfaction of telling the fellows at camp what we did. It won't take more than a jiffy or two."

Crane, however, continued to protest, which seemed to make his canoe-mate all the more set upon the project. They had paused a moment in their paddling, and Piper, dipping his blade, swung the frail craft toward the near-by shore, beyond which the dark, gloomy pines could be seen standing thickly a rod or more from the water's edge.

"I'm going to put my foot on that island to-night," declared Sleuth. "The rest of you had lots of fun with me last night, but I'll show you that I ain't afraid of——"

He stopped suddenly, the paddle upheld and dripping. Seemingly from the midst of the black pines came the long-drawn, mournful howl-

ing of a dog, and that sound, so doleful, so eerie, sent a shivering thrill through both lads.

"Great Jehosaphat!" gasped Crane.

"Did you hear it?" whispered Piper.

"Think I'm deef? Course I heard it."

"It was a dog."

"Mebbe it was."

"Of course it was. Don't you know the howling of a dog when you hear it?"

"I know the howlin' of any ordinary dog, but somehaow that saounded different to me."

"Different? What do you mean?"

"Why," faltered Sile, "it—it was—was sort of spooky, yeou know. Didn't saound just like the howlin' of any real live dog I ever heard."

"But," protested Piper, "it had to be a live dog, you know; it couldn't be anything else."

"Perhaps," suggested the other boy, with a touch of mischief, "it was a cougar."

"This is a fine time to try to crack any stale chestnuts," flung back Sleuth. "I'd really give something to know just what it was we heard."

"Perhaps," returned Crane, confident now that his companion had lost all desire to make an im-

mediate landing on the island, "we might find aout by goin' ashore and prowlin' araound in them dark woods. Come on."

But now it was Sleuth who objected. "There isn't time, you chump; we've got to get back to the camp. Only for that, I'd be willing to——"

He was interrupted again by a repetition of that protracted, mournful howling, which seemed to echo through the black pines and apparently proceeded from a point much nearer than before. The sound of a real flesh-and-blood dog howling mournfully in the night and in a lonely place is enough to give the least superstitious person a creepy feeling, and, with the tragic story of the hermit and his faithful dog fresh in their minds, it was not at all remarkable that the two lads should now feel themselves shivering and find it no simple matter to keep their teeth from chattering.

"The confaounded critter is coming this way!" whispered Sile excitedly.

"We're pretty near the island, aren't we?" returned Sleuth. "Let's be getting along toward camp."

With the usual perverseness of human nature, even though he fancied he could feel his hair rising, Crane proposed to linger a while longer.

"If we do," he said, "mebbe we'll see something."

"Lot of good that will do us," hissed Sleuth. "And there's a big chance of seeing anything in this darkness, isn't there? I thought you wanted to get to the camp?"

"And I thought *yeou* wanted to land on the island. Yeou don't believe in spooks, yeou know."

"What's that got to do with it? Think I want to be chewed up by a hungry, vicious dog? I'm no fool."

"Mebbe not," admitted Crane, in a manner not at all intended to soothe the other boy. "Public opinion is sometimes mistaken abaout folks."

Sleuth dipped his paddle nervously into the water.

"I'm hungry, anyhow," he declared. "They'll have supper waiting for us. It will spoil."

"Look!" sibilated Sile, crouching a bit and lifting his arm to point toward the island. "I can

see something! There's something movin'! See it, Pipe—see it?"

Out from the edge of the pines, faintly discernible through the darkness, came something white which plainly resembled a dog. As both lads stared, motionless, at this thing, it seemed to squat upon its haunches, and, with lifted muzzle, it sent out across the water a repetition of that fearsome howling.

"It's the spirit of Old Lonely's dog!" panted Crane. "Sure as shootin' it is, and we've both seen and heard it."

"See! See!" fluttered Piper in a perfect panic. "There's something else coming out of the woods! It's a man!"

Slowly, like a thing materializing from thin air, a white figure resembling a human being appeared before their staring eyes. It remained standing close to the border of the dark pines, motionless, but seeming to become more and more distinct as they stared at it in stony silence. And now their teeth were chattering, beyond question.

"I guess you're right, Sleuth," Crane finally

gulped; "that supper will spile if we don't get to camp as soon as we can."

With something like frantic haste and vigor they wielded the paddles.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

When they ventured again to look toward the island the white figures had disappeared; but presently they heard, for the fourth time, the blood-chilling howling of the dog, which ended in a sinking, quavering wail that, to their overwrought imagination, resembled a dying moan of agony.

Not until they were approaching the camp and the cheerful fire which gleamed welcomingly across the water did they exchange further words. The firelight shone on the snowy tent, and they could see their friends moving about. Then it was that Piper dogmatically asserted:

"There are no such things as ghosts."

"Perhaps that's so," admitted Sile, with a touch of resentment; "but I'd certainly like to know what it was we heard and saw."

"Think we'd better say anything about it?"

"If yeou've got the idee that I ain't goin' to tell the other fellers, there's another guess comin' to yeou."

"They'll chaff us."

"I don't give a hoot for that. I'm goin' to tell 'em the plain, straight truth, and they can chaff as much as they please."

One of the boys came out to the extremity of the point, cupped his hands to his mouth and sent a halloo across the water. His figure made a black silhouette against the firelight.

"That's Grant," said Crane. "They're gettin' nervous abaout us. Oh! ho! Here we are! We're comin'!"

"Well, it's time you were," flung back the Texan. "Hike along some."

Grant and Springer met them as the prow of the canoe grounded on the sandy beach.

"Wha-what luck?" asked Phil.

"I got one," answered Sile.

"Only one? Well, what the dickens kept you so long?"

"Only one," returned the successful angler defiantly; "but yeou wait till yeou see him. He's

a baby. Come on to the fire and look him over. We've got a heap to tell ye, too."

Silently Piper followed them to the fire, where Crane proudly displayed his catch, swelling with importance as he listened to the admiring comments of the three lads who had remained behind.

"What did you get, Sleuth?" asked Stone, after stooping to turn a big brown loaf of frying pan bread, which has been placed on edge and propped up before a glowing bed of coals.

"Nothing," answered Piper, who had flung himself wearily upon the ground. "We only had one strike all the time we were out, and it was just Crane's luck to get that and land his fish."

"I'm sus-surprised," said Springer. "Why, I thought you——"

"Now cut that out!" snapped Piper sharply. "Can it! If there are no fish to be caught, how is anyone going to catch them?"

"There must be plenty of fish in the lake," said Grant.

"Oh, yes, likely there is," returned the disgruntled angler; "but they weren't swarming around us. It was after sunset when Crane hooked that

one, and it was pretty near pitch dark before we dipped him. No time to fish after that."

"Alas! it's true," sighed Springer—"it's true that the finny denizens of the water take to dry land when they learn that Pipe is after them."

"Think up something original and new," advised Sleuth. "You've worn that gag out."

"Anyway," said Ben pacifyingly, "if we don't get any more, this big fellow should provide a bite for us all. You didn't return skunked, fellows; you had some excitement."

"Excitement!" said Crane, eager to tell of their remarkable experience. "I should say we did! Didn't yeou fellers hear a dog howlin' in the direction of Spirit Island a while ago?"

"In the direction of Spirit Island?" said Grant quickly. "Yes, we heard it, but we reckoned the creature was over on the opposite shore."

"Well, it wasn't," asserted Sile; "it was right aout there on that island. Guess we know, for we was nigh enough to jump ashore."

"On the island!" cried the boys who had re-

mained at the camp, looking at one another questioningly.

"Are you sus-sure, Sile?" asked Springer.

"Yeou bet I be. Sleuth knows. Ask him."

Piper nodded. "There's no doubt about it," he declared solemnly.

"That wasn't all, either," added Crane. "We saw something."

While they listened in wonderment, he told of the two white figures resembling a dog and a man.

"Oh, say, what do you tut-take us for?" snapped Phil. "You and Sleuth have been fuf-faking up a fine story, haven't you?"

"I told you, Crane," said Piper, with a shake of his head—"I told you they wouldn't believe it."

"Don't care whether they do or not. It's the straight goods, by jinks! We was goin' to land on that island for a minute when we fust heard that critter howl, but afterwards Sleuthy didn't have no stomach for landin'. Scat! Say, his teeth rattled jest like dice in a box."

"Now," flung back Piper in hot resentment,

"I knew you'd say that, and you were the one that was scared in the first place."

"If your story is true," said Grant, "I opine you were both some disturbed; and this adds interest to the yarn of the fanciful Mr. Granger. What do you think about that now, Sleuth?"

"Piffle," pronounced Piper. "Anyone knows there are no such things as spooks."

"Then what did you see on the island?"

"We saw two white things that resembled a dog and a man. What they were I'm not ready to assert at this time."

"Whatever they were," said Rodney, "I'm for visiting Spirit Island tomorrow."

The boys had plenty to talk about all through supper, at which Piper and Crane demonstrated that their unusual experience had not dulled the edge of their appetites.

After supper Crane cleaned the salmon, and for a time they sat around chatting in the soft, warm darkness. Of them all, Piper was the only one who seemed moody and thoughtful, ignoring the efforts of the others to rally him.

Finally, growing drowsy, Grant rose, yawned

and stretched his arms above his head, announcing that he intended to turn in. Suddenly his arms came down with a snap and he leaned forward a little, staring out upon the lake.

"Look here, fellows," he said, a touch of suppressed excitement in his voice, "what's this? Tell me what you see away yonder in the direction of Spirit Island?" He had lifted his arm and was pointing.

They sprang to his side and stood in a group, staring over the placid, night-shrouded waters of Phantom Lake, every one of them feeling his nerves tingle and thrill.

"It's a lul-light!" cried Springer. "See it? There it is!"

"A light," echoed Piper, "and it's on Spirit Island! There, it's gone!"

They had all seen the light, which seemed to stare at them like a huge fiery eye that suddenly winked and vanished. Breathless and in dead silence, they waited, and in a moment or two the glaring eye shone forth again for a twinkling and vanished. A dozen times this was repeated before the light disappeared and was seen no more,

although they continued to watch for it for a full half hour.

"Well," said Piper at last, "perhaps you'll believe what we told you, now."

"A howling dog, ghostly figures and a mysterious vanishing light," muttered the Texan. "This sure is all very fine and interesting. Yes, fellows, we'll visit that island to-morrow."

Presently, when they went to bed and tried to sleep, Piper was not the most restless one among them. On the previous night, after disposing of the sleeping bag, he had rolled and groaned while his companions snoozed comfortably and serenely, but now he heard first one and then another stirring on the bough beds, and it was a long time before the breathing of any boy indicated that he had succeeded in cajoling slumber. Even after he was asleep Crane tossed and muttered incoherently. Piper was just drifting off when Sile uttered a sudden yell, which was followed by a tremendous commotion.

"I've got ye!" cried Crane wildly. "I've got ye!"

"Lemme go! Take your hooks off my wind-

pipe!" wheezed the voice of Springer. "Help, fellows! Sile has gone loony! He's ch-choking me!"

In the darkness there was a scramble to separate the struggling bed-fellows, and, with remarkable forethought, Piper, keeping away from the mix-up, struck a match and lighted the lantern. The light revealed Grant clutching Crane and struggling to hold him, while Stone had a grip on Springer. The latter was protesting.

"Let up!" he entreated. "I'm not dud-doing anything; it was Sile. He gave a yell right in my ear that near sus-split the drum, and then he straddled me and began shutting my wind off."

Crane seemed a bit dazed. "I'm all right naow," he protested in evident shame. "I guess I was dreaming. Confaound them things on Spirit Island, anyhaow!"

Piper leered at his late angling companion. "You're a brave one!" he scoffed. "You wanted to land on the island, didn't you? You wasn't a bit afraid, were you?"

"Shut up," growled Crane. "Put that lantern aout, and we'll go to sleep."

"Oh, yes, we'll have a nice time going to sleep, with you cutting up. I was just snoozing beautifully when you yelled like a wild Indian."

After a time the boys quieted down again, and, with the lantern extinguished, they fell asleep, one by one, until only Sleuth, still resentful because he had been awakened, was denied the relaxation of slumber. A long time he lay seeking it, with the others breathing heavily and regularly, and some of them snoring. Once more his ears were acute to all the mysterious night sounds of the woods, and, though he succeeded in dozing a little, he awoke again and again, until it seemed that the night had stretched itself to the length of a year and morning had somehow become side-tracked.

At last in a period of wakefulness he was possessed by a great desire to take another look toward Spirit Island, and, making as little noise as possible, he crept out of his blankets and stole to the front of the tent, which had been left open to admit air.

The moon, rising in the east, shed a pale light upon the bosom of the lake. By this light he

could see the distant mountains outlined against the sky, and it was not impossible, even, to perceive a dark spot in the midst of the lake, where lay the haunted island. There it was, black and silent and soundless, with no mystic light flashing from its shores and no howling dog to disturb the serenity of the tranquil night. Nevertheless, there seemed to be something eerie and awesome pervading the very atmosphere and made doubly acute by the absence of any unusual sight or sound.

"If it isn't really haunted," whispered Sleuth to himself, "it ought to be. A commonplace solution of the mystery would be a great disappointment to me."

Then he returned to his bed and once more besought sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER.

In the morning Grant was the first to awaken, but, although he got up as quietly as possible, Springer heard him and also crept out of the blankets.

"Needn't think you're going to sus-sneak off by your lonesome, you old Texas Ranger," chuckled Phil, following Rod from the tent. "Like one of Sleuthy's Wampanoags, I'm on your trail."

They were surprised to hear a low voice behind them: "I'm watching you both. Nothing but cooking on a camping expedition is becoming somewhat monotonous, and I propose to get into the real sport this morning."

It was Stone, and they grinned at him welcomingly.

"Come on, Ben," invited Rod. "You've sure performed your share of the work, and you've a

right to get in some fun. After a plunge, we'll dress and hike out."

They took a dip and a rub-down in the soft purple light of the breathless, balmy dawn, after which little time was lost in dressing and getting out the fishing tackle.

In the shadowy tent Sleuth and Sile slept on, the latter muttering and groaning occasionally, the former at last bound in peaceful slumber.

"They're sure exhausted complete," said Grant, as he brought the fishing outfit from the tent.

They paused near the canoe upon the sandy beach.

"Which way shall we go?" questioned Rod.

"I've got a feeling that I'd like to tut-try that brook again," said Phil. "It's handy, and we can feel pretty sure of catching something."

"I was thinking the same thing," admitted Grant. "Forbidden fruit is always the most attractive. Besides, three of us would crowd the canoe so that there would be little comfort in fishing. What do you say, Stone?"

"I'm ready for anything," agreed Ben. "And

if we keep to the near side of the brook, we know we'll not be trespassing. Jim Simpson will have no grounds for raising a row."

"And if he doesn't raise a row," laughed Phil, "we'll all be sus-sorely disappointed. Come on."

As they made their way along the shore they cast occasional glances toward Spirit Island, which seemed to crouch in the midst of the lake, dark, silent and mysterious, and therefore intensely fascinating to their youthful minds. In the broad light of day they might show a disposition to laugh at superstitious fancies, but, scarcely less than complete darkness, the shadowy, silent approach of dawn is conducive to sensations of awe and a pronounced inclination to credit the seemingly supernatural. And it is indeed a wholly unimaginative person who has never experienced a thrill over the apparently uncanny and weird.

At the mouth of the brook they were granted nothing but disappointment; the test of various flies failed to lure a single fish to rise to their hooks.

"It seems," said Springer, "that we made a

fearful mistake in bringing Piper with us, or, at least, in permitting him to try his hand at angling. Having frightened all the fish out of the water to hide in the woods, isn't it pup-possible that, in their extreme terror, they may have lingered too long in their places of concealment and perished miserably?"

"I heard of a man once," said Grant, "who taught a trout to live out of the water."

"Easy! easy!" warned Phil.

"This gent I'm speaking of," continued Rod, a twinkle in his eyes, "was an expert fisherman and hunter and lived alone in the woods. One day he caught a trout, and the minute he saw the creature he knew it sure was an unusually intelligent fish, for it was wide between the eyes and had a high, bold forehead. Fortunately, that trout had not been much hurt by the hook, and the hunter proceeded at once to place it in a tub filled with water. All day long he sat around watching the trout in that tub, becoming more and more convinced that he had secured an unusually intelligent specimen. Swimming around, the trout would occasionally look up at him and wink

with such a knowing look in its eye that the man laughed outright.

"In the night, the hunter, still thinking of the fish, conceived a brilliant idea. Getting up quietly, in order that the fish might not hear him, he secured an auger, crept close to the tub, in the side of which, close to the bottom, he stealthily bored a hole that let out all the water without the trout ever becoming aware of it. The experiment proved to be a mighty big success, for there in the tub the following morning the hunter found his trout as lively and chipper as ever.

"After this, having convinced the fish that it could live on dry land as well as in the water, the hunter set about training it, and in a short time that trout would follow him around the camp like a faithful dog. It sure was a right queer sight to see the fish paddling around on its fins in the wake of its master, and it is said to be a solemn fact that the man spent a heap of time trying to teach Trouty to sit up and bark; but as to his success in this there is considerable doubt and more or less disagreement.

"As the warm summer passed, the autumn

faded and winter came hiking on, the trout's master perceived that his pet was beginning to suffer more or less discomfort from cold whenever it went outside the camp; and, having a naturally tender heart, the man manufactured a sweater for the fish, made out of an old sock. He cut holes in this sweater for the trout's fins, so that it could locomote pretty nearly as well as usual, and the little fellow was right comfortable.

"But one day a sad tragedy occurred. It was one of those warm, balmy days of Indian summer, and the trout, probably feeling the need of exercise, followed his master to a stream, over which he attempted to cross on a slippery log. Losing his balance on the log, the fish fell off into the water and was drowned. In this manner, doubtless, perished one of the most remarkable ____"

"Help!" cried Springer, clinging to the bole of a tree and gasping as if in great distress, while Stone, laughing heartily, had sunk upon the ground. "That's the bub-biggest whopper I ever heard, and you sure told some beauts when you fuf-first hit Oakdale, Rod."

The Texan regarded his companions with gentle reproof.

"You'll observe," he reminded, "that, like our interesting friend, Mr. Granger, I was careful to give the story as purely a matter of hearsay."

"And, in spite of howling dogs, flashing lights, and ghostly figures," said Ben, "there may be as much truth in one story as there is in the other. A hermit once lived on Spirit Island; doubtless a hunter once caught a trout and put it in a tub."

"Nevertheless," sighed Springer, "I'm almost tut-too weak to proceed on this little fishing expedition."

He led the way along the nearest bank, exercising due caution in order not to frighten the fish in the pools; but, to the wonderment and perplexity of the young anglers, their efforts continued futile. Annoyed, they watched their flies bob in the little eddies or skim across the placid places, untroubled and untouched. This lack of success served to spur them on, and they followed the brook further and further into the woods, Springer still leading.

Finally Stone reached a broad, deep pool,

spanned at its lower edge by an old limbless tree that had fallen from bank to bank. If there were trout anywhere, it seemed that they must be here, and Ben crept up toward the near end of the pool and made a cast. Over his head a red squirrel scolded at him from a limb, and he could hear the flute-like notes of the hermit thrush sounding from various parts of the woods. Suddenly there was a whirling movement on the surface of the water and a jerk at Ben's line.

"I've got one!" he exclaimed, quickly stepping out upon the old tree in order to have plenty of elbow room for the task before him.

"And I'll get you if you don't skedaddle!" roared a hoarse voice, following which a grizzled, bewhiskered man crashed forth from the bushes on the opposite bank and sprang on to the log, a pitchfork in his calloused hands.

Of course Ben was startled, and, failing to give proper attention to his reel, he permitted the fish to dart under a projecting root near the bank, where it broke away.

"There, you made me lose him!" he exclaimed resentfully.

"But I won't lose you, if you don't hiper in a hurry!" retorted the man, advancing upon the fallen tree with the pitchfork threateningly poised.

"That's right, dad!" cried another voice, and Jim Simpson rose from a place of concealment on the opposite bank somewhat further down the stream. In his hands he held an old muzzle-loading gun.

"What right have you to trouble me?" demanded Ben. "I'm not on your land."

"But you're fishing in my brook," declared the man. "I'll show you sassy young cubs that you can't fish in this brook!"

He had reached the middle of the log, from which Ben now stepped back to the ground without showing a disposition immediately to retreat further.

Springer, above, had heard Stone's exclamation when the fish struck, and, hurrying back, he reached the upper end of the pool as the man with the pitchfork balanced himself precariously upon the fallen tree. Instantly Phil lifted his fly-rod and made a skillful cast, which sent the

hook sailing through the air to strike the collar of the man's coat and cling there. Reaching out hurriedly, Springer grasped the line beyond the tip of the rod and gave it a pull.

It needed no more than this slight tug to cause Hank Simpson to lose his balance, and backward into the water he fell with a tremendous splash.

At the same moment Grant, who a short time before had detected young Simpson hiding behind the bushes, which led Rod to ford the stream unperceived, sprang forward and landed fairly upon the fellow's back. Seizing the gun, Rodney wrested it from Jim's hands.

"I don't opine you'll do any shooting this morning with this blunderbuss," said the Texan.

The young fellow, who had been knocked floundering to the ground, recognized his antagonist of the previous morning and began to scramble away on all fours in ludicrous haste.

Puffing and gulping, old man Simpson rose from the pool and stood up with the water rising to his waist. The sharp tug given by Springer had torn the hook loose, and now Phil, without pausing to reel in, hurried to Stone's side.

"You confounded rascals! You young whelps!" spluttered Hank Simpson, shaking his dripping fist at the two boys. "I'll smash ye!"

"If I were in your place, sir," said Grant, holding the gun, "I reckon I wouldn't try any smashing. We were careful to keep on the side of the brook that you do not own, and we give due notice now that we'll fish here whenever we please."

"What be you doing on that side then?" demanded Simpson.

"Oh, I just came over to interview your worthy offspring. That's him back yonder in the woods calling to you."

"Dad—hey, dad!" Jim Simpson was crying. "They've got the gun."

It must be recorded that Simpson senior gave utterance to language that would not look well in print.

"I'll have the law on 'em!" he fumed, as he recovered his pitchfork and retreated toward his own land.

"Go as far as you please," said Grant, who had inspected the gun. "Why, this thing isn't

even loaded, and I don't believe it could be fired if it was."

With which he pitched the old musket toward Simpson and calmly recrossed the brook.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT CARL'S PAIL CONTAINED.

Approaching the camp on their return, the three boys became aware that at least one of their companions was up and stirring, for the clear, ringing strokes of an axe were echoing through the woods in the vicinity of Pleasant Point.

Now there is in the sound of an axe, when heard in timberland, something strangely cheerful and enlivening, especially if the hour be early morning and the sun is in the sky. In a subtle way it seems suggestive of that mysterious time in the practically unknown Dark Ages when man, newly awakened to the knowledge of his superiority over all other animals, came forth from his black cave and built himself a house of wood. There is a joy, too, in the wielding of an axe by strong hands, in swinging it lightly and deftly and driving the blade home, and in the thrill of the yielding shock which passes with

each blow from the handle to the fingers that grip it. And as a healthy, strength building, body invigorating exercise, the use of an axe in the open air makes tame by comparison the swinging of Indian clubs, tossing of dumb-bells or yanking at chest weights. As a tonic and a builder of strength and vigor, no doctor's prescription can equal the use of the axe.

Gray smoke, rising from the point, told that a fire had been started, and near this fire, feeding it, sat Sleuth Piper. Crane appeared with an armful of wood, which he cast upon the ground. Then, perceiving the returning boys, he glowered upon them reproachfully.

"Think yeou're smart, don't ye?" he cried. "Think yeou're smart, sneakin' off without wakin' a feller up. Well, what'd ye ketch?"

Sleuth, putting another stick on the fire, did not deign to look around.

"Nothing dud-doing," confessed Springer, coming up and dropping the empty basket. "I'm afraid grim starvation stares us in the optic. And Piper is to blame for it."

Still Sleuth did not turn.

"Piper is to blame for it," repeated Phil, with pretended condemnation. "Even in the tributaries of this lake, the streams which flow into it, the fish have heard of his arrival and——"

At last Piper turned. "Oh, go off somewhere by yourself and lie down," he snarled. "You make me sick!"

"Dud-dear me!" grinned Phil. "The great detective, the bold pioneer, the marvelous angler, is extremely touchy this morning."

"Joshing before breakfast sometimes produces unpleasant feelings," laughed Grant. "We'll all feel better, I opine, after we eat."

"And, fortunately," said Stone, "there's a good supply in the larder."

"You fellers didn't have no luck at all, did ye?" chuckled Crane, evidently finding some satisfaction in this. "Up to date I'm the top-notch fisherman, and yeou'll have to go some to beat me."

"Oh, but we sure did have fun," returned Rodney.

"You bet," eagerly agreed Phil; "regular circus. Wait till I tut-tell you about it." Stuttering

somewhat more than usual in his eagerness, he related the amusing story of the encounter with the Simpsons, and his ludicrous description of the elder man's plunge into the pool caused even Sleuth to crack a smile.

They were still laughing over this affair when, to their great surprise, Carl Duckelstein appeared upon the scene.

"Whoa! Stop!" cried the Dutch boy to the old white horse, that was now attached to a light but rickety wagon. "It iss no further you vill haf to go py this direction. Pack up undt around turn."

Before getting out he headed the horse away from the camp. This accomplished, he gave the animal some unnecessary advice about standing still and not running away, after which he turned cheerfully to greet the campers.

"It peen again a goot morning," he beamed. "You vas glad to see me, I oxpect."

"We sure are," returned Grant, "though you near gave us heart failure by your early arrival. How did you ever succeed in waking up at such an unearthly hour?"

"Oh, sometimes I up vake when you didt not oxpect me," replied Carl, getting the can of milk and at the same time carefully removing from the wagon a sizeable tin pail with a cover, the latter being held securely in place with a leather strap that passed the longest way round the pail.

Watching him, the boys noted that he handled that pail carefully, placing it gently on the ground some distance from the wagon, after which he delivered the milk.

"What yeou got in there?" asked Crane, pointing at the pail.

"Oh, nefer you mindt about dot," was the mysterious answer. "Vot I haf in der pail got is somethings my own amusements for. Yah."

He could not have chosen a better way to stimulate the curiosity of the boys.

"Show us what it is, won't you?" urged Springer.

The Dutch boy shook his head. "I couldt not so do. It vould not be safety."

"Oh, come on," entreated Sile. "Jest give us a peek."

"Maype vot I haf got vould out come."

"It must be something mighty dangerous, considering the way you've got it sus-strapped up," said Springer.

Piper rose to his feet. "I scent a mystery," he declared in a low, sibilant tone, his eyes fixed on the pail as if they would bore it through.

Crane stepped forward, whereupon, with evident great excitement, Duckelstein hastened to intercept him.

"Don't let it touch you!" cried Carl. "Maype it vill bite you."

"Get aout!" retorted Sile. "There can't be nothing in that pail big enough to hurt if it did bite."

"I varn you to avay keep."

"Then yeou've got to tell us what it is. If yeou don't tell, I'll open the thing anyhaow."

"Maype you vould not peliefe uf I should toldt you."

"Oh, go on. Course we will."

Eagerly the boys gathered near while Carl seemed hesitating, and all urged him to tell what the pail contained. After shaking his head again

and again, he repeated: "Maype you vould not peliefe."

They assured him of their absolute faith in his veracity.

"Tell us quick, or open she comes," threatened Sile.

"Vale, listen," said the Dutch boy, with a sigh of resignation. "Didt you efer catch a young gougers?"

"Cougars!" exclaimed Rodney, regarding Carl suspiciously. "Do you mean to say you have young cougars in that pail?"

"Some young gougers hass me in dot pail," solemnly asserted the fat boy. "It vas not easiness to catch does gougers."

Crane suppressed a burst of incredulous laughter.

"What sort of a mare's nest is this?" he scoffed.

"It vas a mare's nest not," snapped Carl; "it vas a gouger's nest. I seen dot nest yesterday der voods in, but when it vas daylights dose gougers vill pite, undt I avay kept. Vhen it dark got

I up crept undt der gougers caught. I haf them der pail in. Yah."

"Tell it to Sus-Sweeney," jeered Springer.

"Sweeney didt not know me," answered Carl soberly, "undt so he couldt not tell it to me. You didt consist to know vot vas der pail in, undt now you haf out found."

"Who do yeou s'pose is goin' to believe such ridiculous stuff?" demanded Crane.

"I couldt not help him," asserted Carl sadly, "uf it didt not peliefe you."

"Take off that strap. Take off the kiver and let us see."

"I vould not do dot uf one thousand tollars vould gif you to me!" excitedly cried the fat boy. "Money couldt not inducement me. Der minute dot cofer peen off took der gougers vould out pop."

"Aw, say, that's silly. Yeou jest watch me take it off."

Duckelstein grabbed at Sile's arm.

"You vill avay let my gougers get!" he shouted frantically. "It vas not right vhen so much troubles has made me to catch them."

Grinning, Crane pushed the anxious lad away.

"I'll be keerful," he promised. "I'll jest unbuckle the strap and lift the kiver a bit, so we can take a peek without lettin' the critters get auot."

"Eferypody get avay off!" shouted Carl, as Sile advanced upon the pail. "Uf one of dose gougers does out come, he vill chump at you. Uf one of dose gougers should pite you, you vill knew it."

Apparently very much alarmed himself, he backed behind the tent, round which he peered at Sile.

"Somehow, Ben," said Grant, speaking to Stone in a low tone, "I've got a notion that it may be a right good plan to keep at a safe distance. That Dutch boy doesn't seem as sleepy as usual this morning."

Standing a rod or more from Crane, Piper and Springer eagerly watched the proceedings of removing the strap and opening the pail. On his knees, Sile performed this action, gently lifting one edge of the cover and leaning forward to peer through the crack. Suddenly something like a bullet seemed to leap forth from that open-

ing, striking the inquisitive boy squarely between his eyes.

Over upon his back went Crane, giving utterance to a yell of astonishment and pain. One of his feet, flung out, struck the pail, which upset, the cover flying off. Instantly a swarming, buzzing mass of angry hornets rose from the nest that rolled out of the pail.

"Ow! Wow!" howled Crane, scrambling to his feet and frantically waving his arms around his head. "Jumpin' Jehosaphat! Ow! Murder! Help! Confaound the—— Ouch! Yeow!"

Attracted by his frantic gyrations, the hornets swarmed upon him in a mass, all of them as mad as hornets can be, and eager to do their duty. They plugged him on the jaw, back of the ear, on the wrist, and they got into his hair, and sought to bore through his clothing. Yelling like an Indian, he danced and thrashed about, while the others, without an exception, made haste to retreat from the zone of danger.

"I toldt you dose gougers vould pite!" shouted Carl. "You couldt not plame me when a varnings I gafe you."

"Run for the water, Crane!" cried Stone. "That's the only way to get rid of them. Run!"

For a moment or two the tortured lad stumbled round in a circle, and then, still uttering wild howls, he ran toward the lake, into which he plunged and disappeared. The hornets trailed after him and hummed angrily over the water, beneath which, encumbered by his clothing, Sile was swimming in a desperate effort to get as far away as possible before he rose for a breath.

"Lie low and keep still, everybody," warned Stone, as a few stray hornets buzzed and circled around the point. "If we find it necessary to pull Sile out to save him from drowning we will do so, but he's a good swimmer."

All the way round to the end of the point Crane swam, rising eventually in the deep water close to the bold rocks. In this manner he succeeded in eluding his vicious little pursuers, and they soon turned back to circle and buzz around the nest that lay on the ground near the overturned pail.

"Are you hurt mum-much, Sile?" asked Springer, cautiously creeping toward the rocks,

behind which Crane remained with only his head showing above the surface of the water.

"Hurt!" was the wild retort. "I'm killed! Bate them critters plunked me in more than twenty places. I'm dying! Wait till I get my hands on that infernal Dutchman! I'll wring his neck! Can yeou see any of the critters araound here?"

"They've gone back to their nest, I guess. You can cuc-come out."

Cautiously Sile lifted himself and crept out upon the rocks, to which he clung with some difficulty. One eye was almost closed, there was a huge lump on his jaw, and he was marked in various other places. His friends gathered near to condole with him.

"Yeou wait!" he moaned——"yeou wait and see what I do to the scalawag that played this miserable trick on me! Where is he?"

They looked around for Duckelstein, but he was gone, and the absence of the old horse and the wagon indicated that he had taken the precaution to depart in a manner that would not make it necessary for him to return immediately.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DISPOSING OF UNWELCOME NEIGHBORS.

"To begin with," said Grant, "I told you that I didn't think the Dutchman was as sleepy as he looked, but I'll confess I never reckoned him capable of putting up a joke of this sort."

"Joke!" rasped Crane, shaking with mingled pain and wrath. "I don't see no joke abaout it."

"You cuc-can't see very well, anyhow," reminded Springer. "One of your eyes is plumb buttoned up. You're a spectacle."

"Yeou don't have to tell me. Say, ain't there nothing I can put on to stop the smarting? What are you all standin' around for? Want to see me perish in horrible agony right before yeour eyes? Why don't yeou do something?"

It is always advisable for campers, when planning to spend some time in the woods, to include in their outfit a medicine case containing such simple remedies as may be needed; but, unfor-

tunately, the Oakdale boys had failed to provide anything of the sort. Therefore they were now at a loss to know what could be done to alleviate Crane's sufferings, but presently Grant thought of something, and, taking care not to attract the still whirling and whirring hornets, he went back into the shadows of the woods and procured two heaping handfuls of soft, moist earth, which, as well as possible, was presently bound or plastered upon Crane's wounds.

"Wait till I ketch that Dutchman!" Sile kept muttering through his set teeth.

"Keep still," advised Rod. "The bandage will hold those dirt poultices over your eye and behind your ear, but you'll shake off the dabs I've stuck to your jaw and in other places, if you keep on talking."

So Sile relapsed into silence, save for an occasional bitter groan, and the others took into consideration the problem of getting rid of the hornets.

"We'll have to destroy the nest somehow," said Rod, "for as long as that remains where it is those pests will give us trouble."

"We'll find a way to fix them after breakfast," said Stone. "As long as we don't go near them and fail to attract their attention by our movements, there's little probability that they will give us much annoyance."

"This cuc-camping expedition is certainly proving rather sus-strenuous and exciting," observed Springer.

For some reason Piper seemed to find it difficult to suppress a show of satisfaction, but this he tried to do, even though he could not forget with what glee his companions had joshed him about his unpleasant experience with the sleeping bag. Had Sleuth known that the victim of Carl Duckelstein's "gougers" was responsible for that first night adventure, he must surely have regarded Crane's misfortune as a piece of retributive justice. Unsuspecting, however, he refrained from gloating and pretended to commiserate with the wretched chap.

With the fire replenished, Stone put on a kettle of water, and, while that was rising to the boiling point, he peeled and sliced some potatoes from the small supply they had brought. Bacon, fried out,

provided fat in which to fry the sliced potatoes, and the salmon Crane had caught was put into the kettle to boil. There was a supply of bread left over from the loaves baked upon the previous day; and, for variety, Stone made hot chocolate instead of coffee.

Now at home chocolate, although occasionally enjoyable, is liable to seem rather flat, insipid and tame; but for breakfast in camp, made with milk, either fresh or condensed, and served piping hot, there is nothing better or more satisfying.

And so, when the fish was properly boiled, the potatoes fried and the chocolate ready, their appetites being by that time keen and demanding, they sat down to a meal which seemed to all, with the exception of Crane, the best they had yet tasted. Even in spite of his still burning wounds, Sile ate with apparent relish. Once they all ducked as a passing hornet whizzed overhead with a humming sound like that of a tiny gas motor turning up at full speed. Crane was the only one who did not laugh; he growled.

Breakfast over and everything cleared away,

they resumed consideration of their new and unwelcome neighbors, a few of which, apparently on guard, hovered around the nest.

"With a long pole we might smash the sus-stuffing out of that nest," declared Springer.

"And probably get ourselves well stung while we were about it," said Stone. "A smudge is the thing to cook them. A good, heavy smudge, started as close as possible to the nest opening, would smother them as they came out."

"How close is as close as possible?" questioned Crane.

"Right up against the nest if we can put it there; not over six or eight inches away, at most."

"Well," drawled Sile, with a returning touch of whimsicality, "I'd sartainly like to see some of yeou fellers make that smudge and start it goin'."

"Misery loves company," laughed Rod. "I don't judge there's enough wealth in this outfit to tempt me to try that."

"Perhaps we can work it without getting near enough to be stung," said Ben.

"How? how?" they cried.

"If we can find a pole long enough to enable me to reach the nest and remain hidden behind the end of the tent, I'll show you."

Some time was spent in securing the pole, but eventually, some rods from the camp, a tall, straight, slender sapling was selected, cut and trimmed. Then Stone searched about for the material to make his smudge, stripping the bark, both wet and dry, from cedar tree trunks. He also secured a huge dry toadstool as large as his two fists.

With these things the boys returned to the smoldering campfire, where, placing the toadstool in the center, Ben wound and twisted and tied the strips of cedar bark about it, with plenty of the dry bark on the outside and numerous strips running through the elongated ball. The end of the pole, whittled sharp, was then carefully thrust into this ball, after which Ben set it afire and fanned it until it was sending forth a surprisingly heavy, rank cloud of smoke.

"Now," he said, "to see what can be done with our friends, the enemy."

His movements were watched by the others as,

with the butt of the pole in his hands, he slipped swiftly round behind the tent. From his place of concealment he thrust the reeking smudge forth toward the hornets' nest, where a few of the creatures, seemingly on guard, still circled with much angry grumbling. Up against the end of the nest that contained the opening, the smudge was pushed, and the nest itself was practically enveloped in smoke.

"Naow come aout, consarn ye, come aout!" cried Crane revengefully. "Mebbe that will cure yeour asthmy and stop yeou from wheezin'."

It was impossible to see whether or not the hornets came forth, but certain it was that, did they attempt to do so, they were promptly overcome by the smoke, for the few that darted and circled in the vicinity were not augmented in number. Some of these, even, apparently making a desperate and reckless charge toward their threatened home, were seen to drop, overcome by the rank smoke.

Lowering the butt of the pole to the ground, Stone left the smudge burning against the hornets' nest and rejoined his watching friends.

"We'd better keep watch to see that it doesn't set fire to the woods," he said. "By the time it burns out there will not be many hornets left to bother us."

"You've got a great head on your shoulders, Stoney, old scout," complimented Piper.

"I wish," said Crane revengefully, "that I could hold that Dutchman's nose in that smoke for abaout one minute. I guess he'd cough some."

It was a long time before the smoke of the smudge died down to a tiny, wavering spindle of blueish gray; but when this took place the nest lay there, burned a bit and blackened at one end, a deserted looking thing indeed. If any of the hornets had survived, it seemed that they had departed in desperation or despair.

"Who is going to see if there are any left?" asked Sleuth.

"I think Sile would be a good one to do that."

"What?" shouted Crane, glaring at the speaker with his unbandaged eye. "What d'yeou mean?"

"Why," said Sleuth innocently, "if there

should be any, and you happen to get stung two or three times more, it wouldn't make much difference. You couldn't feel a great deal worse."

"Bah!" snarled Sile. "That's sense, ain't it? If you get me monkeyin' round that thing yeou'll know it, by jinks!"

It was Stone who picked up the pole and poked the nest around with it. Although he mutilated that nest, no hornets appeared, and, thrusting the charred, pointed end of the pole into the thing, he carried it away into the woods and left it.

"There," he said, returning triumphantly, "we're at peace once more."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HERMIT'S CABIN.

Not until an hour or more after dinner did any of the boys set out to visit Spirit Island. With the exception of Crane, all showed some eagerness to go; with the stingers extracted from his wounds, Sile was much more comfortable, but he made his condition an excuse for remaining at the camp. And, as the canoe was not large enough comfortably to carry more than three, Stone also self-sacrificingly agreed to remain behind.

The day was hot and muggy and still, and there were some masses of clouds bulking up along the western horizon as the canoe put forth bearing the three investigators. The two who remained behind watched them from the shore and wished them luck.

"Bring back that dog with ye, Sleuthy," called Sile. "Yeou've got lots of courage in the day-

time, even if yeou be rather chicken-hearted after dark."

"Bah!" flung back Piper from the waist of the canoe. "Anything we'll find isn't liable to make me run half as fast as you did this morning. As a sprinter, Craney, you could cop the blue ribbon if you happened to be chased by a 'gouger' or two."

"Thinks he's smart, don't he?" muttered Sile, turning to Ben. "Why, he's the biggest coward I ever saw. He'd run from his own shadder."

In the full light of day Spirit Island wore a harmless, peaceful look, and the cool shadows of its pines seemed genuinely inviting to the perspiring lads who wielded the paddles. As they drew near the island Grant cast a glance toward the heavy black clouds, which were steadily mounting higher in the sky.

"Think there's going to be a shower, Phil?" he asked.

"Wouldn't wonder," answered Springer. "Those look like thunderheads, though we haven't heard any thunder yet."

At this very moment, however, a low, mutter-

ing, distant grumble came to their ears, as if far away beyond the mountains the storm was getting into action.

"I think, comrades," said Piper, "it will be wise for us to make all possible haste to conclude our investigations and return to the security of our tent. Without sufficient shelter, I'd scarcely find pleasure in being caught upon this island by a thunderstorm."

"There's the hermit's hut, you know," suggested Rod.

"I hadn't thought of that," returned Sleuth. "And, at any rate, it's quite possible that the roof is rotten and leaky."

Again the thunder was heard, somewhat more distinctly this time, and the clouds seemed to increase in blackness and density as they rose.

Choosing a place to land, the boys brought the canoe to the shore, got out and pulled it up safely. There they paused for a moment before seeking a way through the pines, thrilled a bit in spite of themselves by the fact that their feet were at last upon the haunted island.

"Come on," said Rod. "I agree that it will be a right good plan to hurry some."

He led the way into the deep shadows of the pines, which seemed strangely hushed and silent in the hot, breathless air. In those woods no bird was heard chirping and no squirrel chattering. It gave them a feeling that flesh-and-blood creatures of all kinds had for some reason learned to avoid the mysterious island.

Presently they came to a small opening or glade amid the pines, and there before their eyes were several deep excavations in the ground.

"Look!" said the Texan in a surprised voice. "There are the holes Granger told us about—the holes made by people seeking to recover some of the plunder Old Lonely was supposed to have buried."

Only a few moments did they linger there. The thunder was growing louder, and they hurried on until they came into what apparently had once been a well-beaten path. Following this path, they reached another and much larger tree-surrounded open spot, which seemed to be located

near the center of the island. And there before them they saw the hut of the old hermit.

It stood at one side of the opening, close beneath the shadows of a thick cluster of pines which were taller than the other trees upon the island. Indeed, so close to these tall trees had the cabin been built that, having sagged and lurched like a person overcome by age and disease, it was now supported by the very largest tree of the group, against which it leaned. Only for this tree, the crude, ill constructed building must have long ago fallen to the ground. A part of the roof had caved in, leaving a ragged hole, and the remainder seemed likely to drop at the slightest provocation. In one side of the cabin there was a small square window, in which remained no fragment of glass or sash. In the front of the cabin the remnants of a stout door made from hewn timbers still hung upon heavy rusty hinges.

So lonely, wretched and repellant was the appearance of this ruin that the three boys, who stood gazing upon it in silence, were all deeply moved, and they wondered that a human being could have lived in such a place for five long

years with no friends or neighbors and only a dog as his companion. Truly, it seemed that no one save a hunted criminal, in constant dread of the prison from which he had escaped, would have chosen to dwell there, aloof from other human beings and shut in by the somber pines which protected him from inquisitive eyes.

The silence and gloom of the island, the sight of the old hut, the distant mutterings of thunder, and a subtle, electrical tension in the air combined to give the young investigators a most unpleasant sensation of nervousness, which was revealed by the sudden cackling burst of laughter that came from Springer's lips—laughter that was suppressed almost as suddenly as it began.

Now it is in strange and silent places that the echo, once believed to be a mocking elf, chooses always to linger, mischievously waiting to make itself heard. And in the depths of the pines beyond the hut the taunting elf awoke in mockery of Springer. The laughter flung back from those recesses, like that of the perturbed boy, yet strangely and weirdly dissimilar, caused Phil to gasp a bit and clutch at Grant's arm.

"Hear that!" he whispered.

"Nothing but an echo," said Rodney in a low, even tone, although he realized that his own nerves were unusually tense.

"Gee! that's right," breathed Phil in relief; "but it gug-gug-gave me a jump."

"It must be evident, comrades," said Piper hurriedly, "that yonder hut can scarce afford us shelter from the storm which is advancing apace."

The dark clouds had now shut out the sun, and the shadows beneath the pines were swiftly becoming so dense that the eye could pierce them for a short distance only, save when a flash of lightning made every object stand forth with great distinctness. The thunder which followed these electrical discharges was of the snappy, crackling kind, but the protracted space of time between each flash and report made Grant confident that the heart of the storm was yet miles away.

"You're right, Sleuth," agreed Springer eagerly; "we cuc-can't get away from the rain in that old sh-shack."

"Let's take a look inside the hut, anyhow," suggested Grant. "I hate to hike away without doing that much."

Starting forward as he spoke, he stepped into a shallow excavation, which he would have observed before him under different circumstances. Annoyed, he scrambled up from his knees, to which he had plunged.

"Look out, fellows," he warned, noticing for the first time that there were many similar excavations in the glade. "The treasure hunters sure have near dug up the whole place."

With some reluctance Phil and Sleuth followed Rodney. At the open door of the hut the Texan stopped to look inside, and his companions peered over his shoulder. But the gloom was now so intense that little of the hut's interior could be made out.

"Nun-nothing there, anyhow," said Phil.

"Nothing that anybody need be afraid of," declared Piper. But his teeth clicked, and his voice was filled with an odd vibration that betrayed the agitation he sought to conceal.

"I'm going in," said Rodney. "Let's all go in, so that at least we can say we've done so."

"Lot of good that will dud-do us," muttered Springer.

"Here goes," said Grant, stepping inside.

Moved by a sudden desperate impulse, Piper pushed Springer aside and followed Rodney.

"If you're afraid," he flung back at Phil, "you don't have to come; you can stay out."

"Who's afraid?" indignantly snapped Springer. "I guess I've gug-got as much nerve as you have."

He entered also, and the three boys stood there in the hut of the old hermit. Their feet were on the bare ground, for there had never been a floor.

Dimly, at one side of the hut, they could see the framework of a bunk, on which, doubtless, Old Lonely had drawn his last breath, with the faithful dog watching at his side. A chimney, made of stones and clay mortar, had, with the lurching of the hut, broken in two halfway to the roof, and it now seemed ready to come tumbling down in one mass. The stones of the fireplace had been torn up, and doubtless this was the work

of those who had fancied it possible some of the man's plunder might be found beneath them.

"Looks to me lul-like the old shanty is liable to tut-tumble down almost any minute," whispered Springer chokingly. "I don't want it to dud-drop on my head."

Grant lifted his hand. "Listen!" he urged.

With lips parted, they did not breathe for a few moments, and their ears were strained to hear any unusual sound. What they heard seemed to be the dull, muffled regular ticking of a clock coming from some hidden spot which they could not locate.

In the semi-darkness the whites of their eyes shone distinctly as they turned significant glances upon one another. Granger had told them of this mysterious ticking, and it brought vividly to their minds his description of the finding of the dead man with his clock beating off the seconds upon a shelf above the bunk. Perhaps it was the electricity in the atmosphere that produced a tugging sensation at the roots of their hair. Springer's eyes rolled toward the open doorway, through which he longed to dash, being restrained only

by fear that such an action would subject him to the joshing of his campmates. Piper was scarcely less eager to depart.

Such dim light as sifted into the old hut came through the small window and the ragged hole in the roof, above which black clouds were now outspread. Suddenly athwart these clouds streamed a writhing streak of lightning, which illumined the entire interior of the cabin, causing Piper to crouch and cringe, his mouth and throat dry, his heart beating like a hammer.

"By Jinks!" said Rodney. "That was a good one. I reckon it struck somewhere."

It seemed that it must have struck among the mountainous hills to the westward, for suddenly they echoed and re-echoed with a tremendous crashing, rumbling, earth-jarring roar that gradually and reluctantly died away. Following this a light rush of wind passed through the tops of the tallest pines, dying out quickly and seeming to make the silence still more profound.

And in that silence the three boys distinctly heard a faint tapping, as of ghostly fingers beating feebly against the cabin wall. This was

accompanied by a sound still more disturbing, resembling a low, half-whining wail.

"Gug-good by!" choked Springer, as he dashed from the hut.

CHAPTER XX.

GRANT TO THE RESCUE.

Piper's trembling hands clutched Grant and clung to him.

"I'm going too," said Sleuth huskily. "It's ten to one this old hut comes down in the storm. I wouldn't stay here, anyhow."

"I don't reckon I would myself," acknowledged Rod.

"Then," said Piper, tugging at him, "we'd better hustle. If I know Springer, he won't stop this side of Camp Oakdale, and we don't want to be left on this island with no way of getting off."

"That wouldn't be pleasant," confessed Rod, "though I don't opine Phil would desert us. He'll wait for us."

"Don't you believe it," spluttered Sleuth as they reached the open air. "If we want to stop him before he gets away with the canoe, we've got to make tracks."

Stumbling across the glade, they found the path, along which they dashed, Piper in advance. Reaching branches whipped them across their faces, and it seemed that the black thickets on every hand contained a thousand menacing terrors. True, Grant was not as frightened as Piper, but the moment he began running he was overcome to some degree by that fear-compelling sensation known to every boy who has fled in the dark from a menacing creation of his fancy. Occasional flashes of lightning served only to blind them and make the ensuing gloom seem deeper and blacker. The thunder-shocks beat upon their ears, but as yet no rain fell.

Panting heavily, they came out suddenly upon the shore and realized they were some distance from the place where the canoe had been left. In his confusion and excitement Sleuth turned in the wrong direction, but Grant checked him by calling sharply:

"This way, Piper—the canoe is this way!"

"No, said Sleuth, "you're wrong; it's this way."

But, fearing to be left alone on that terrible island, he turned and followed Rod.

In a few moments they discovered Springer in the act of launching the canoe, and Grant shouted at him angrily.

"What do you reckon you're doing?" cried the exasperated Texan. "Are you trying to run away and leave us, you coward?"

Phil's face was almost ghastly, but he paused and waited for them. "I wasn't gug-going away," he declared.

"It sure didn't look like it!" retorted Rodney sarcastically.

"I was just gug-going to get the canoe into the water and wait for you," explained Springer. "I'm gug-glad you've come. It isn't raining yet, and——"

"But it will be right soon. We're due to get a drenching if we start out."

"We'll get a dud-drenching if we stay here."

"We might," suggested Sleuth, with pretended bravado, "succeed in finding poor shelter beneath the thickest pines."

"And a sus-soaking on the water won't be any worse than one on land," argued Phil.

"I was not thinking of the rain," said Rod, casting a glance toward the black, lightning-torn clouds; "it's the wind we've got to reckon on. We don't want to be swamped out in the middle of the lake."

But now Piper joined Springer in urging him away, and, yielding, he got into the canoe and seized one of the paddles.

"Lively!" he ordered. "Get in and push off. Show what you've got in your arms, Phil."

"You bet I will," promised Springer.

A way from the island shot the canoe, propelled by all the vigor they could muster. Only a few rods had they paddled when there arose from the depths of the pines the mournful howling of a dog, which was drowned by another tremendous peal of thunder. Even this, however, could not spur them to put more strength into the paddle strokes, for already they were doing their best.

Their one object, now, was to do their utmost to reach Pleasant Point before the storm should

come upon them in all its fury, or at least to get as near the point as possible; for they knew that to be caught far from shore in the canoe while the open lake was being swept by such a burst of wind as often accompanies severe thunder-storms would be not only most uncomfortable, but, in all probability, extremely perilous.

Between the thunder-claps they could hear afar in the mountains a low and ominous moaning, but even Sleuth turned no backward glance toward the black sky that seemed to shut down perpendicularly not far beyond the white cross that marked Lovers' Leap. As yet, although the surface of the lake was broken and dark, there seemed little wind, save occasional puffing blasts of short duration.

So intent were they upon their own business that it was some time before they perceived the small white sail of a boat somewhat to the right of their course. With each wind gust the sail filled and dipped, but between the puffs it was barely taut, and the boat, a tiny, punt-like affair, was moving slowly. Only one person could be seen, and he sat in the stern of the boat, steering.

"That gent sure better hustle some," observed Grant, "unless he's anxious to get a proper ducking. If he has oars, he's foolish not to use them. We're traveling twice as fast as he is, and we'll soon be passing him."

"A fellow might think him dud-deaf and dud-dumb and blind," said Springer. "If he hears or sees the storm, he's a chump not to get a move on."

Piper opened his lips to make a remark, but a jagged, hissing spurt of lightning caused him to duck involuntarily and hold his breath, awaiting the thunder that must follow. It came, crashing and flung back in reverberations from the mountains, and Sleuth shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"Next time I visit Spirit Island," he declared, "I shall take special pains to make sure there's no thunderstorm on tap."

"Nun-next time!" scoffed Phil. "I'll bet there isn't money enough to hire you to go there again."

"Speak for yourself, my friend," retorted

Sleuth, "and judge not the courage of others by your own cowardice."

"Cowardice! Bah! You were sus-scared almost stiff."

"But I didn't run away."

The moaning sound was growing louder and more distinct, changing gradually but swiftly to a suppressed, smothered roar. The black sky seemed to close over Lovers' Leap and blot it out. The rain was coming, a few drops of the advance guard pattering around the canoe, in which the two paddle-wielders continued to exercise the full strength of their arms.

They had been seen by Crane and Stone, both of whom were now standing well out upon the point, watching them with no small anxiety.

Like the trio returning from Spirit Island, the person in the sail-driven boat seemed to be making for Pleasant Point, and they were now so near that they recognized him as he, looking round, appeared to discover them for the first time.

"Well, I'll be dud-dished!" exclaimed Springer. "It's our friend, James Simpson, Esquire. Seems

to me he's planning to make a cuc-call at our camp."

"A right good time for him to come around if he intends to provoke further trouble," muttered Rodney. "I'd advise him to lower that sail and use his oars. I opine there's going to be something doing in the hurricane line directly."

"You bet," agreed Piper, as the roaring sound increased with surprising rapidity. "Here she comes now."

"Hold the canoe steady, Phil," admonished the Texan.

With a shriek the wind swept over them, tearing the surrounding water into foam. In a twinkling, almost, it struck the sail of Simpson's boat, and in another twinkling the tiny craft upset, pitching its occupant into the lake.

"I knew it, the chump!" cried Grant above the screaming of the wind. "He's got his ducking ahead of the rainstorm."

"Wonder if he can sus-swim?" shouted Phil apprehensively. "Don't want to see the pup-poor feller drowned."

"He sure ought to know how to swim, living

near this lake," returned Rodney. "Where is he, anyhow?"

"There! there!" cried Sleuth, pointing, as a head appeared some distance from the capsized boat. "Look at the idiot! See him throw up his hands! Stone and Crane are shouting to us. Great marvels! He *can't* swim!"

Already, with a sweep of his paddle, Grant had pointed the canoe toward the overturned boat and the youth who, splashing wildly only a short distance from it, seemed quite unable to reach and grasp it for support.

"Pull, Springer—pull for all you're worth!" he commanded.

The driving blast of wind aided in speeding them toward the imperiled fellow.

"If he gets hold of this canoe he'll upset it!" palpitated Piper.

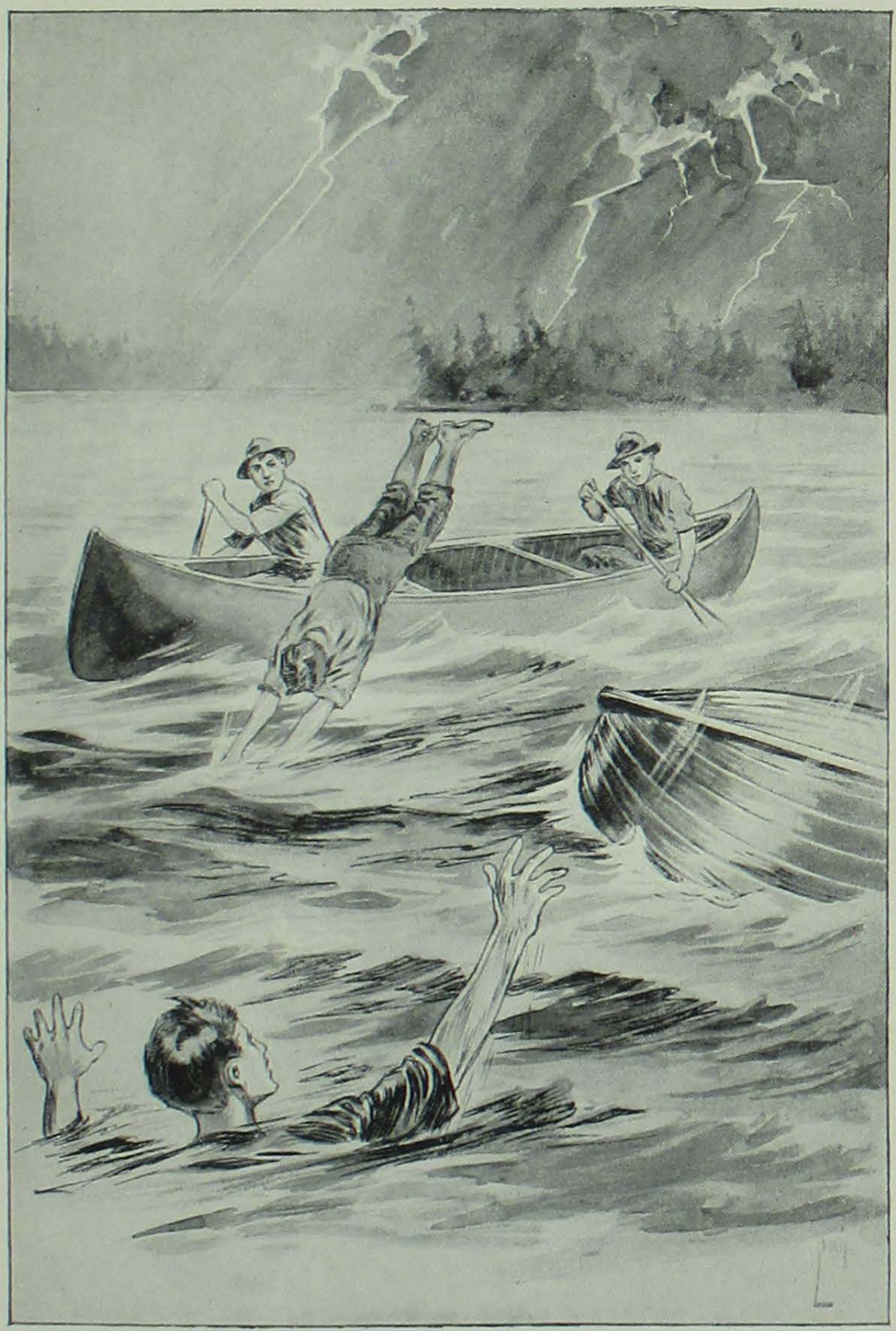
Simpson's head disappeared from view and was not seen again for several moments, after which his frantic efforts shot his body above the surface halfway to the waist line. Gulping, gasping, terrified by the experience through which he was passing, the fellow turned his blanched face

and appealing eyes toward the three boys who were now bearing down upon him.

Almost invariably persons who find themselves in deep water and cannot swim strive desperately to lift their bodies as high as possible and thus aid in their own undoing, and this was precisely what Jim Simpson did. Had he simply paddled gently with his hands and held his breath whenever his head went under, lacking in a rudimentary knowledge of swimming though he was, he might have kept afloat for some moments; by his tremendous struggles, however, he baffled himself and made it imperative that his would-be rescuers should reach him quickly.

"He's gone—he's gone again!" screamed Sleuth, as Grant once more slightly altered the course of the canoe.

"Keep down! Keep low in the canoe and sit steady!" commanded Rodney. Then, rising, he did a difficult thing to do under the most favorable circumstances; he dove headlong from the canoe without upsetting it. With three strong strokes beneath the water he reached Simpson,



HE DOVE HEADLONG FROM THE CANOE WITHOUT UPSETTING IT.

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whose collar he grasped with one hand at the back of the neck. They rose together, the Texan holding the other off and striking out as well as he could for the capsized boat.

The excited boys watching from the point uttered a cheer. Then the rain swept over the lake in a tremendous blinding cloud, shutting from their view the canoe, its occupants, and the two fellows in the water.

CHAPTER XXI.

ESTABLISHING FRIENDLY RELATIONS.

Heedless of the blazing lightning, the crashing thunder and the drenching downpour, Stone and Crane remained exposed upon the shore and besieged by anxiety concerning what was taking place a short distance away upon the lake. Through the blinding rain swirl they finally perceived a dark object approaching, and, running swiftly, they reached the beach just as the wind and waves hurled upon it the canoe containing Springer and Piper.

"Where's Grant?" cried Stone, aghast. "What made you desert him?"

"Yes, why didn't yeou stick by, confaound ye?" snarled Crane, snatching the paddle as Phil staggered up beyond the reach of the water. "Yeou've got a lot of sand, ain't ye?"

Sleuth floundered forth, gasping, and he grabbed Sile's arm as the latter seemed about to

put off in the canoe in the face of that terrific gale.

"What are you going to do?" asked Piper.

"Leggo!" rasped the excited fellow. "I'm goin' aout there after Rod."

"No need of it," was the assurance. "He's all right."

"Grant's all right," substantiated Springer. "He got Simpson to the boat, and they're both hanging fuf-fast to it. Rod told us to get ashore as quick as we could before the canoe swamped. We cuc-couldn't hold the old thing against the wind, and she was taking in water."

It was no easy matter, however, to satisfy Crane; but finally, by their united efforts, Phil and Sleuth succeeded in preventing him from attempting to put out in the canoe, which was now more than half full of water.

"You couldn't do it, anyhow," declared Piper. "Look how the waves beat in here. You'd be swamped in half a minute."

"What are we goin' to do?" demanded Sile feverishly. "Be we goin' to stand araound here and let them hang to that upsot bo't?"

"The wind should drive them right in here," said Stone. "There they are—there they are now!"

Like the canoe, the drifting boat was first seen through the blanketing rain as a black splotch on the water. In a few moments, however, they could discern the heads of the two lads who clung to it, and their shouts were answered by a reassuring call from Grant.

When the boat had drifted nearer Rod came wading forth from the lake, assisting Simpson, who seemed rather weak and limp. Heedless of lightning or thunder, the waiting boys stood in that downpour of rain and cheered heartily. The canoe had been carried beyond the clutch of the waves, and the beach was left free for the reception of the drifting boat, which was also drawn up securely as soon as it floated within reach.

Speechless, Simpson stumbled at Rodney's heels as the Texan made for the tent, the front flaps of which, with commendable foresight, had been closed and buttoned by Stone and Crane. So well had the tent been pitched and guyed that it had withstood the sweep of the wind practic-

ally unmoved, and, releasing the lower button of the flap, the boys crawled inside, one after another. With the exception of Simpson, who stretched himself out, exhausted, they sat around upon the ground, a sorry-looking but triumphant bunch.

The wind howled around the tent and crashed together the limbs of the trees; through the woods it roared, with a sound scarcely less awesome than that of the almost incessant volleying of the thunder. Upon the canvas shelter the rain beat in torrents, but the structure demonstrated its quality by shedding the downfall in a wonderfully effective manner. The good judgment of Rodney in locating the camp-site upon a spot where the water would flow away in all directions was made evident by the fact that no trickling rivulets seeped into the tent.

Until the thunder and lightning began perceptibly to abate the boys wasted few words in conversation. After a time, however, to the satisfaction of all, it became evident that the storm was passing.

Simpson sat up and surveyed Rodney. "I

guess," he said slowly, "I'd sartain been drowned if you hadn't give me a hand."

"You don't swim?"

"Nope; never learned how."

"You should. Every fellow ought to know how to swim."

"Guess that's right, but I never had no chance."

"Chance? What do you want? Here's a whole lake of water to learn in."

"But how's a feller goin' to learn if he ain't got nobody to show him?"

"So that's the trouble. Well, look here; if you want to learn and you'll take the trouble to come around every day while we're camping here, I'll agree to do my best to teach you."

"That's generous, considerin' our fuss about you fellers fishin' in that brook," said Simpson. "You must be the right sort, arter all."

"What the dud-dickens were you doing out there in that boat?" questioned Springer. "That's what I'd like to know."

He was not the only one who felt curiosity concerning that point.

"Why," answered Simpson, "I was comin'

back after deliverin' some pertaters, onions and other truck to Mr. Granger. We keep him supplied with garden stuff. He's good pay, and prompt."

"Oh, I see," nodded Rodney. "But you seemed to be making for this camp."

"I was. I saw the storm comin', and this was the nearest shelter; so, for all of our row, I thought I'd take a chance that you'd let me crawl under kiver here. Kinder nervy, wasn't it?" he concluded, with a grin.

"Oh, I think we'd let you in," said Stone.

"But why didn't you dud-douse your sail when you saw the wind coming?" asked Phil. "If you'd pulled it down and used your oars, you'd bub-been all right."

"Didn't have any oars, nothing but a paddle, and I was using that to steer with. This is the first time I ever tried a sail. You see, it was pretty hard work paddlin' that punt across the lake and back, so I decided to rig up a sail to help along. I thought I'd make shore before the wind hit me hard enough to do any damage. Bad judgment, I own up."

"It was," agreed the Texan. "How often do you carry garden stuff across to Granger?"

"Oh, two or three times a week."

"What do you know about him?" questioned Piper, his interest seeming suddenly sharpened. "He was over here to call on us yesterday. What's he doing around here?"

"Rusticating for his health, and writing."

"Writing?"

"Yep."

"What's he writing?"

"Stories. Don't you know about it? He's one of them fellers that write stories for the papers and magazines. Funny sort of business to get paid for, ain't it? But he says he gets paid, and he always has plenty of money."

"Ah!" breathed Sleuth. "The mystery of Mr. Granger is solved. Now I understand why it is that he possesses such a vivid imagination and is so remarkably clever in spinning yarns and filling in the little details and touches. A writer of fiction, eh? Ha, ha, Mr. Granger; you're found out."

"But," reminded Springer, suddenly recalling

their experience upon Spirit Island, which had temporarily been forgotten because of the exciting adventure that had followed, "it doesn't seem to me that there was much fiction abub-bout some of the stuff he tut-told us. Say, Simp, do people around here say that Spirit Island is haunted?"

"Oh, they tell such things," answered the farmer's son; "but I guess it's all bosh. Granger has talked to me about it some. He seems to have an idee in his noddle that there's really ghosts on that island. One day I saw some of the stuff he'd writ about it. Say, you know he don't do his writin' with a pen; no, sir, he has one of them new-fangled thingamajigs that prints the words jest as fast as he can pound 'em off with his fingers. Did you fellers ever know that folks got paid for makin' up lies and writin' 'em off for the papers? Don't seem right, when other people have to work to get their money." There was something like resentment in his manner.

"Every man to his trade," laughed Grant. "The old shower is practically over, fellows. I hope the sun comes out good and warm, so we can dry our clothes comfortably."

The thunder was still grumbling in the east, like the muttering of a fractious giant gradually falling asleep, and a few raindrops mingled with the dripping from the trees that continued to patter upon the tent. Beyond the mountains the sky was brightening, and soon a ray of sunshine burst through the dispersing clouds.

In a few minutes, the rain having ceased entirely, the boys opened the front of the tent and came forth to find the world looking bright and beautiful after its invigorating bath. Once more the lake was smiling in the sunlight, and the woods seemed to have taken on a fresher green, while the air, that had been heavy and humid before the storm, was clear and light and warm, without being depressing.

Their wet, clinging clothing was uncomfortable, but, fortunately, all of the campers had brought extra underclothes, and it would not be so difficult upon this sunny afternoon to dry their outer garments.

Simpson's boat lay unharmed upon the sandy beach, and the paddle was found not far away, where it had been tossed by the waves. They

helped him unstep the mast, for the sail would be of little use to him in making his way along that shore; and, besides, as he somewhat sheepishly confessed, he was practically cured of a desire to seek further experience in the art of sailing such a craft.

"I've got enough," he admitted. "This kind of a rig ain't no good against the wind, and it's rather dangerous sailing her with the wind, when there is any wind to speak of."

"Look here," proposed Crane, "why can't yeou bring us garden truck, same as you do Granger? We've made arrangements for that Dutchman, Duckelstein, to send us milk, butter and aigs, but there ain't no need to give him a monopoly of all aour business. Besides, I've got a score to settle with his fat-headed boy, and mebbe after that's over we won't even get the stuff we've contracted for." As he spoke he involuntarily touched his eye, which was still swollen, although the bandage had been removed.

"Cal'late I can fetch ye anything you want," answered Simpson promptly. "And, considerin' what you've done for me, I'll furnish truck at a

rock-bottom figger; won't charge ye a cent more for the stuff than we can get by haulin' it into town."

"That sure is generous," laughed Grant, though the farmer's son could not comprehend why he seemed amused. "We brought only a few vegetables, and they are already practically used up. We need potatoes, onions and beans."

"We've got some rippin' good green peas," said Simpson. "I guess some of them wouldn't go bad."

"Bring us a mess."

"And beans—don't yeou forget the beans," cautioned Crane. "By hokey! I'm hungry for good baked beans."

"We haven't a pot to bake them in," reminded Stone.

But Simpson immediately assured them that he felt certain he could supply them with a bean-pot, which they might return when they were through with it.

"Leave it to me," he said; "I'll fetch what you want, and mebbe I'll be able to get round with the stuff to-night. So long."

After pushing out from the shore he paused and turned, apparently struck by a thought.

"Say," he grinned, "jest you fellers go ahead and fish the brook over yonder all you blame please. I don't cal'late nobody will bother ye no more."

"Much obliged," laughed Grant.

CHAPTER XXII.

PIPER GROWS SECRETIVE.

Dressed only in underclothes while their other garments were drying, the boys really suffered no discomfort whatever. They amused themselves in various ways, and in camp the least ingenious person may keep himself occupied and entertained without much trouble. For Crane and Stone the account of the adventure of the others upon the mysterious island proved deeply interesting, and much time was spent in discussion and speculation. It was observed that of the trio who had visited the island Piper had the least to say about it, being much absorbed in meditation.

"Look at Sleuthy," whispered Sile, nudging Springer. "His analytical mind is at work, and I cal'late he's tryin' to form a few deductions."

As if he had caught the remark, Piper looked

up and gave Crane a hard stare that was doubtless intended to be piercing.

"Next time I visit that island," he declared, "I'm going to take the shotgun along, and it will be loaded, too."

Springer whooped derisively. "Oh, yes, next tut-time you visit the island you'll tut-take the shotgun!"

"What," questioned Grant, "would you have done with a shotgun if you'd had one with you today, Pipe?"

"He'd dropped it when he ran," asserted Springer.

Piper promptly turned on Phil. "If I were in your place, I'd be ashamed to mention running. Like Crane, pursued by hornets, you demonstrated that the wings of Mercury or the seven league boots would be of little aid to you in covering ground when you're thoroughly frightened."

"I'm willing to admit," said Grant, "that the sounds we heard on the island and the conditions under which we made our visit of investigation gave me a few unpleasant and awesome sensa-

tions. Nevertheless, sitting here at this moment, I'm much disinclined to admit that I believe in haunts. I reckon it was the approach of the storm, more than anything else, that upset us complete."

"How about the tut-ticking of the unseen clock?" asked Phil.

"A woodtick, perhaps, boring into the rotten timbers of the hut."

"And the ghostly knockings?"

"There is no person who has not at some time heard seemingly mysterious rappings, which were afterward found to be of the most commonplace origin."

"Well, there was that mum-moaning cry. You heard it, didn't you?"

Rodney admitted that he had. "With more time at my disposal," he asserted, "I opine I would have looked around for the cause of it."

"Bub-but the howling of the dog?"

"Most dogs are given to howling."

"How about the white figures Crane and I saw on the island?"

"Imagination sometimes plays right peculiar tricks with the eyesight."

"But we saw them. Yes, we did," corroborated Sile earnestly. "I'll swear to that."

Piper listened to this colloquy, his eyes bright, his manner that of one keenly interested.

"Comrades," he announced, rising to his feet and posing, "I shall remain forever unsatisfied if we leave Phantom Lake with this mystery unsolved. I propose to find the solution."

"Oh, yeou'll do a lot in that line!" sneered Crane. "Yeou've had a swelled head ever since yeou was called to give testimony in court at Stone's trial. Before that you never done anything but talk, and yeou ain't done nothing since then. That was an accident."

Sleuth's lips curled scornfully. "Envy! Jealousy!" he declared. "The opportunity has not since presented itself until the present occasion for the full exercise of my acumen."

"Wow!" whooped Springer. "Ac-cac-cac-cumen! That's going some. Gee! Pipe, when you're at home you must sit up nights to study the dictionary."

"In command of English pure and undefiled," retorted Sleuth, "you are plainly extremely limited." Then he strolled off by himself and spent at least a full hour in deep thought.

Some time before sunset Jim Simpson reappeared in the punt and landed at the Point.

"Told ye I'd get round if I could," he said, stepping ashore. "Didn't know but the old man would raise objections and have something else for me to do, but when I told him what had happened to me, he give me a good dressin' down for being keerless, and then said that you chaps could have any blessed thing you wanted that he owned. Say, the old gent ain't sech a bad feller, though he nigh works me to death sometimes. Soon's I come of age, you bet I'm goin' to hit out for myself. Livin' on a farm ain't what it's cracked up to be, I tell ye that. I've got the truck for ye here in the bo't."

He had brought a peck of new potatoes and a bountiful supply of green peas, as well as onions, beans for baking and a pot to bake them in. But that was not all; he proudly passed over something wrapped in brown paper, announcing:

"Here's some lambsteak for ye. The old gent killed a lamb yesterday, and, thinkin' mebbe you might like some meat, he cut this for ye and sent it as a present."

"Lambsteak, green peas and new pertaters," spluttered Crane. "Gee whiz! We'll sartain have a feast. Say, Simp, yeou're right abaout yeour old man; he ain't a bad feller. Get busy, Stoney, and start the repast to cookin'."

Ben was willing enough to do this, for his appetite, like that of the others, had been keenly aroused by camp life.

He set his companions shelling the peas and preparing the potatoes, while he started up a good fire.

"You fellers seem to be havin' a pretty good time," observed Simpson, as he sat watching them. "Guess you're enjoying it all right."

"Sure we are," answered Rodney. "Ever camp out?"

"Shucks, no; never had no time for that. Guess if you'd ever lived on a farm you'd know how 'twas. Don't s'pose you're much used to real work."

Grant smiled. "I was brought up on a ranch, and I reckon I know something about work."

"A ranch!" cried the farmer's son, his eyes widening. "Where?"

"In Texas."

"Sho! You don't say! Well, I snum!" He suddenly regarded Rodney with an amazing increased amount of respect. "Never saw nobody before that ever lived on a ranch," he confessed. "Was you a real cowboy?"

"In a way, yes; I've punched cattle."

"I *do* declare!" breathed Simpson. "That must be great fun. I've always thought I'd like to be a cowboy."

"Have you?"

"You bate! I say it must be rippin' fun to be a real cowboy and jest ride 'round on a horse and do nothing but tend cattle that don't have to be milked and cleaned and fed in a tieup and fussed over, the way farmer's critters are. I've read about cowboy life, and it sartainly is the kind for me."

The Texan laughed outright. "Not if you are adverse to hard work," he asserted. "Likely

the stories you've read about cowboy life have given you the impression that it consists principally of adventure and romance and very little work. But let me tell you straight, partner, there's no harder work a fellow can do, and there's mighty little romance connected with it."

But Simpson shook his head incredulously. "Can't be so," he doubted. "Sometime mebbe I'll go West and be a cowboy."

"If you carry out that design," returned Grant, still smiling, "you'll soon come to realize the fact that, in the way of work, Eastern farm life is almost play compared with cow-punching. One experience upon the range in a Texas norther would knock all the romance out of your noddle, to say nothing of the lesson you'd get during a good dry, blistering summer, when you'd have to be on the hike day after day from an hour or more before the first peep of dawn until long after nightfall."

Still Jim Simpson was not convinced, for, like many a mistaken Eastern youth, he had come to regard the life of a cowboy as a most enviable

existence, and nothing but a test of its hardships could convince him otherwise.

"Why, right now," he said, rising, stretching and yawning, "I've got to hustle back to the farm and putter around till it's dark and time for supper. S'pose I'd better be goin'."

But ere he departed Sleuth mysteriously drew him aside and talked with him for some time in low tones that carried no distinguishable word to the rest of the campers. Naturally, Piper's friends speculated over this, and when Simpson was gone they sought in vain to quiz Sleuth. He rebuffed them flatly.

"It's told that curiosity once killed a cat," he said, "and I can aver that it got a certain party badly stung by 'gougers.' When I'm ready to make known my private business, I'll do so without being coaxed or badgered."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRANE RELENTS.

The supper was indeed a genuine feast. The vegetables, being well cooked, tasted delicious to the hungry boys, and Crane declared that never before had he "stuck a tooth into such snappin' good lambsteak." Their wet clothing had dried out completely, and, properly dressed, they were inclined to lounge about after eating, their well filled stomachs making them comfortably torpid and lazy.

But Stone would not let them loaf until the work of starting the beans baking was performed. Slightly more than a full pint of beans were placed in a kettle of boiling water to which one-fourth of a teaspoonful of baking soda had been added. Two of the boys cut and brought a big supply of dry hardwood, while the other two were digging a deep hole in the ground a

short distance from the regular fireplace; and when the hole was dug to the cook's satisfaction he filled it with plenty of light kindling and built above it a high pile of crossed hardwood sticks, cob-house fashion. A blaze was then started in the kindling, and soon the whole mass was roaring like a bonfire.

While the fire was burning down and filling the hole with a mass of red-hot, glowing coals, Ben completed the preparation of the beans,which had been permitted to boil a full half hour. A sizeable piece of salt pork was cut in two pieces, each of which was gashed with a knife. One piece was placed in the bottom of the kettle, and then the beans, with the water fully drained off, were poured in upon the pork, the second piece of which was placed on top of them. Salt, pepper and a tablespoonful of molasses were added, and the cover of the pot put on securely.

Next the coals were carefully raked out of the hole, into which the beanpot was placed. This done, the coals were pushed back around the pot, packing it on every side and covering it from view. Lastly these glowing coals were covered

by a few inches of earth, and then Ben announced that the work was done.

"Huh!" grunted Springer skeptically. "Do you mum-mean to tell us that beans will cook pup-properly that way? Why, they won't get half done before those coals will all be dead."

"We'll see about that in the morning," said Ben, with a faint smile. "I admit this is the first time I've ever cooked them in this fashion, but I once saw beans baked in a hole at a Grand Army encampment, and I don't believe I've bungled much."

The evening passed quickly and pleasantly enough. For a time Grant strummed on his guitar; but, somehow, they were not in the mood for singing, and when they finally grew weary of story-telling and chatting they went to bed.

And for the first time since coming to Pleasant Point all slept soundly the night through.

It must be confessed that Stone arose in the morning with a slight feeling of anxiety about the beans, although he successfully disguised this fact, taking the regular plunge with the others and dressing as deliberately as any of

them. No one suggested fishing this morning, but all seemed eager for breakfast.

"Bub-bub-baked beans would go first-rate," said Springer; "but I'm afraid we'll feed on something else."

The table laid, they watched Ben open the bake-hole and lift out the beanpot. To their surprise, in that hole there were still coals which gleamed the moment the air reached them, and the pot was so hot that it was handled with some caution and difficulty. When the embers were fully removed from the cover, Stone opened the pot, and immediately an aroma rose that brought exclamations of delight from everyone. The beans were smooth and full and brown and perfectly baked.

"I tut-take it all back," cried Springer. "I offer a humble apology, chef. Say, you're a wizard."

"The greatest cook that ever came daown the pike, that's what he is," pronounced Crane. "Oh gimme a dip at them beans before I expire."

Now for breakfast, under ordinary conditions, beans are a hearty food indeed; but the short time they had been in camp had prepared the

lads to relish just such heavy food, and digest it, too. Therefore, like the supper of the previous night, this breakfast was voted a tremendous success.

Shortly after breakfast Crane suddenly started up in a listening attitude, and, observing him, the others also listened, hearing the sound of wagon-wheels a short distance away in the woods. A look of almost savage joy contorted Sile's features as he hissed:

"Here comes that confaounded Dutch boy! Yeou watch me! I'll scare him into fits."

But when he hurried forward, eager to put his hands on Carl, he met with a surprise. Drawing the wagon, the old white horse came into view, but the person on the wagon-seat was not Carl. Instead, it was a fat, placid, moon-faced man, who was smoking a huge crooked pipe.

"Hang it!" growled Sile, halting abruptly. "It's the old Dutchman himself!"

"How you vas, poys?" gurgled Herman Duckelstein, without offering to step down from the wagon. "You can took dose thing vot I haf

prought; undt I vill aroundt turn. A crate hurry I vas in."

"Huh!" exploded Sile. "Where's that boy of yourn?"

"My poy? He didn't not came."

"Yes, I notice it. Why didn't he come?"

"Maype he vas busy py something else. Yah. Vas it disappointment dot he didt not come?"

"Yes, a great disappointment," rasped Sile. "I'm mighty sorry not to see him this morning."

"You seem to like my poy, Carl, ain't it? You seem to enchoy his companies vhen he comes to seen you, no? Vot vas der matter py your face?"

Sile ignored the question. "I kinder hope you'll send Carl tomorrer morning, Mr. Duckelstein, he said." "Yeou're right abaout aour enjoyin' his company."

"Carl toldt me dot an eel didt catch him here," said Duckelstein, a suspicious twinkle in his eyes. "Didt you at him laugh undt good sports have vhen dot eel caught him?"

"Well," admitted Sile, grinning a little, "yeou see we couldn't help laffin', considerin' the fact

that it wa'n't no eel, only an old root that got ketched on his line."

"Vas dot correction?" said Duckelstein soberly. "Maype dot poy didt not toldt me dot. Maype he toldt me dot he peen afraidt der eels vas vaiting in der voods aroundt here to chump at him undt give him a pites. Didt you nefer see anythings around here dot at you chumped undt gafe you a pite, no?"

In spite of his efforts to refrain, Springer suddenly giggled outright, which caused Sile to flush painfully and frown in a forbidding way.

"Yeou've got a purty smart boy, mister," growled Crane. "Anyhaow, I s'pose he thinks he's smart."

"Vale, maype," beamed the Dutch farmer, "he iss not a fool so pig as somepody took him to be. Sometimes he peen carelessness undt forgetful. I peliefe vhen he vas here der last times a tin pail forgot him, mit a cover undt a strap to holdt on dot cover vhen dere vas in der pail somethings dot Carl didt not vant to out come. Uf you didt not objections, I vill avay took dot pail, pecause maype Carl vould like to use him again. Yah."

And now Grant laughed aloud. "There's the pail and strap yonder on the ground, Mr. Duckelstein," he said. "We sure don't want any property that doesn't belong to us."

"That's right," said Crane. "Take yeour dratted old pail."

"Maype you didt not a choke enchoy vhen it vas yourself on," said Duckelstein, in a manner of mild reproof. "Dot is der vay uf some peoples. It is crate fun vhen der choke vas somepody else on, but vhen it home comes dot makes a tifference. Over think dot a little, my poy. Uf you couldt not a choke stood yourself on, don't play him somepody else on, pecause you couldt not tell vhen dot other feller vill pack get at you a choke vot iss petter as der vun you didt up think yourself."

Silenced, Crane retreated to think it over. He was still thinking some time after Mr. Duckelstein had departed. Finally he looked up, a slow grin creeping over his face.

"I guess that old Dutchman is abaout right," he nodded; " a feller that can't take a joke hadn't better be playin' 'em on other folks. Further-

more, yeou can't never be sure that the dumb duffer yeou're havin' fun with ain't got a knock-out come-back hid up his sleeve. Guess I'll forgit it and try to show that I ain't a squealer. Maybe I won't hug that Dutch boy when I see him, but, anyhaow, I'll agree not to hand him a wallopin'."

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANGE BEHAVIOR OF SLEUTH.

Before long Piper grew restless, and his uneasiness was noticed by the others.

"What's the mum-matter with you, Sleuth?" questioned Springer. "You're as fidgety as a dog with fleas."

Piper was stalking up and down in front of the tent. Without answering Springer's question, he turned to Grant and asked the time.

"Nine o'clock," said Rodney, after looking at his watch.

"I feel," said Sleuth—"I feel the call of the wild. The wilderness is beckoning me to its bosom."

"He's got 'em again," declared Crane.

"I must respond to the call. I must fare forth into the solitudes. I'm going away from here."

"He's going away from here," repeated Grant solemnly.

"Well, I fuf-feel like doing something myself," confessed Springer. "I'm with you, Sleuthy."

"You are *not*," retorted Piper positively. "I desire not your society nor that of anyone here. Alone I shall tread the dim trails of the forest."

"I cal'late he's goin' after Injun scalps," said Sile.

Piper turned a piercing look on the lanky fellow. "Of late," he said, "although my mind has been greatly occupied with other matters, I have given a little thought to a most peculiar occurrence which transpired on the first night after we pitched our camp in the wilderness. The party from whom I obtained the sleeping bag that I brought with me had been keeping that bag in the attic of his settlement home, and it is not often that common black ants penetrate to the attic of a house and make their nests there. I likewise recall that, ere I sought to occupy the bag for the night, someone made remarks about the probability that it would he hot to sleep in and would cause me to itch. Furthermore, in summing up, I remember a certain individual who, after I had gotten into the bag, took great

pains to tie it up securely around my neck, so that I could not get out without assistance. Although I may not lift the scalp of some blood-thirsty Wampanoag, I will confess that these meditations of which I speak have led me to thirst for the topknot of a certain paleface who thinks himself very smart—and *was* smart, in a certain sense, on an occasion not far remote."

"Why, Sleuth," drawled Crane, "I hope yeou don't think——"

Piper held up his hand. "Don't convict yourself by unnecessary protestations. Even now I am loath to believe that a comrade could be so perfidious. The sadness which the bare suspicion brings to me adds to my longings to be alone. Perhaps the solitudes will cleanse my heart of resentment. Farewell until I return."

"But when do you expect to return?" asked Stone, as Piper started away.

"That I can't tell; it may be hours before you again look upon my countenance. However long the time is, I bid you not to worry. I shall return in due course, even though, ere my return, the sun may linger low in the western sky." Then,

with the stealthy step of a trapper, he slipped into the woods and was gone.

"He's on to you, Craney," laughed Springer. "You bub-better watch out."

"Oh, Sleuth's harmless," laughed Sile; "and, anyhaow, I can't help thinkin' it's more than a desire for solitude that's sent him pikin' off into the woods all by his lonesome."

Whatever the reason for Piper's action, and despite the fact that he had told them hours might pass before his return, they finally began to wonder over the matter, with the afternoon on the wane and no sign of their absent companion. They had occupied themselves in various ways, but at last whatever task or game they took up was broken and interrupted by frequent pauses to look for Piper and to seek one another's opinions concerning this "new freak" of his.

"Perhaps," suggested Grant, as at last they lounged before the tent, "he has gone alone to solve the mystery of Spirit Island."

Springer immediately scoffed at this. "Dud-don't you believe anything of the sort. There

isn't money enough to hire him to go on to that island alone."

"Besides," said Crane, "haow could he get there? He didn't take the canoe."

"He must be hungry," said Stone. "He hasn't had any dinner."

Five minutes later some distance away on the lake they perceived a small white rowboat that seemed to be heading for their camp. In the boat a single person plied the oars industriously.

"We're going to have a visitor" said Stone. "Wonder who it is?"

"Cuc-can't be Mr. Granger," was Springer's immediate decision. "He came in a canoe t'other time."

"It doesn't look like Granger," said Grant, stepping out from the trees and shading his eyes with his hand. "Great Caesar! fellows, I believe it's Piper!"

"Piper! No, no; you must be mistaken."

But, as they watched the boat draw nearer and were able to get a better view of its occupant, they were compelled to acknowledge that he looked like Sleuth. And Sleuth it was who came

rowing serenely into the cove and beached the boat.

"Ho, comrades!" he hailed, stepping out. "I have returned. I am with you once again."

They surrounded him.

"Where have you been?"

"What kept you so long?"

"Wh-where did you get that boat?"

"What sort of a rinktum be yeou cuttin' up naow?"

"Restrain your impatience, I beseech you," said Piper, pulling the boat up securely. "In good time I will reveal all. Just now, if you've any cold snack in the larder, I would satiate the cravings of the inner man."

Nor could they induce him to relieve their curiosity until he had eaten. When, presently, he wiped a few crumbs from his mouth with the back of his hand and leaned with a sigh of satisfaction against the trunk of a tree, they again insisted on an explanation.

"Friends and fellow citizens," began Sleuth.

"This ain't no stump speech," interrupted

Crane. "Come daown to earth and get it aout of yeour system as quick as yeou can."

"Well, then, I've been visiting."

"Visiting?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The gentleman who called on us and entertained us with such beautiful, well-polished and interesting tales."

"Granger," said Grant.

Sleuth nodded. "Yes, I was seized by a consuming desire to visit Mr. Granger in his cabin retreat."

"But how did you gug-gug-get across there?" asked Springer. "Did you tut-tramp it all the way round the lake?"

"If you will kindly permit me to recount my doings in my own way, you will become informed in a manner regular and satisfactory. I did not walk around the lake shore. I have never seen a fiction writer in the throes of composition, and always I have longed to know how they do it. Therefore, it didn't take me long to decide that I would casually drop in upon Mr. Charles

Granger with the design of discovering him at his labors. With this in my mind, I made arrangements with Simpson to take me across the lake in his boat at ten o'clock today."

"Why didn't you tut-tell us what you was going to do?" questioned Phil, a bit resentfully.

"Because I feared that some of you would insist on accompanying me, and it was not at all likely that Granger would be pleased to have several of us come in upon him. Furthermore, I wished to ask him some questions concerning his labors and his methods of writing stories, and it is said that some authors are much disinclined to talk about their business. I fancied that, alone, I could obtain much more satisfaction. It was necessary for Simpson to show me where Granger was to be found."

"And you found him?" said Grant.

"I found him. Simpson left me, that he might return to his arduous labors upon his father's farm. Alone, I approached the log cabin, which is temporarily occupied by Charles Granger. As I drew near, the clicking of a typewriter came to my ears, and I perceived that the cabin door

was standing open to admit air and sunshine. With the stealthy tread of a redskin I slipped up to that door and peered in. There was the author, hard at work, his typewriter mounted on a little table and sheets of manuscript scattered all about. He was so absorbed that he did not hear me, and for some moments I watched him in silence. Presently he lifted his head and sat back to meditate, without doubt, upon the clever construction of some involved sentence. Chancing to turn his eyes in my direction, he perceived me and jumped to his feet as if shot.

"I will not pretend," proceeded Piper, "that Granger was pleased on beholding me. In fact, he seemed much annoyed, and in fervid language he desired to know what I was doing there. Beaming on him in a friendly fashion, I entered and explained that I had heard he was a writer of fiction, and that, therefore, my curiosity had been awakened and spurred to a two-minute clip. After a time, perceiving perhaps no token of guile in my demeanor, Granger cooled down and laughed over the start I had given him. He was genuinely pleasant and friendly, and we chatted

for some time. He even showed me one or two of his stories in a publication, but he admitted that far more came back than were accepted and paid for."

"Well, did yeou hang araound there all the afternoon?" asked Crane.

"Indeed, no, comrade—indeed, no," replied Piper. "I will admit that my call was more or less protracted, but, on perceiving that the genial host was becoming aweary, I took the hint and departed. Having for some time felt the desire to visit the hotel, I seized the opportunity. It is a splendid establishment for the entertainment of the summer vacationist with a long purse and a yearning desire to be separated from his good money, and it seems to be prospering. Why should it not, having near at hand such attractions at Lovers' Leap and the haunted island?"

"But the bub-boat," said Springer—"where did you get the bub-boat?"

"At the boathouse connected with the hotel. They have boats of various kinds for the pleasure of the guests, and, for my own special use, I hired the one in which you saw me returning. Had to

plank down four dollars a week for its use, and pay the first four bones in advance."

"Yeou extravagant boob!" cried Sile. "I didn't know yeou had four whole dollars to yeour name."

"Indeed," said Sleuth loftily, "I have much more than that; but a man of wealth seldom boasts of his possessions."

"It was right thoughtful of you to hire a boat," said Grant. "One canoe was not sufficient for the whole of us, but now we can all go fishing on the lake at the same time, if we wish."

"You failed to observe, I think," returned Sleuth, "that I stated I secured that boat for my own special use."

"Hang it!" exploded Springer. "You don't mean to sus-say that you're not going to let the rest of us use it at all? That would be downright hoggish."

"If I desire company in the boat," retorted Piper, "I'll extend an invitation. Otherwise, I, alone, will use it."

"Kick me," exclaimed Crane in disgust, "if I ever figgered it aout that yeou was that kind of a

narrer-contracted, selfish critter! Sleuthy, yeou're showin' a side of your nater that makes me plumb ashamed of yeou."

"He's joking," said Stone.

"I never was more serious in my life," averred Piper.

Nor did their scorn and ridicule seem to have the least effect upon him; in spite of it he continued to caution them not to trespass. Their indignation turned to coldness, but still he was unmoved.

"I have my reasons," he declared, "and, until I see fit to reveal them, it will be a waste of time to pester me." After a few moments of silence he added: "Do you know, comrades, I believe I can write stories myself."

This remark was received with an outburst of amused derision, and Piper shut up like a clam.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.

During the days that followed the behavior of Piper was even more inexplicable and annoying; for each day, refusing to let anyone accompany him, he set forth alone in his boat, sometimes leaving the camp before noon, and usually remaining away until near nightfall. Nor would he offer any explanation, compelling his perplexed and offended friends to remain as content as possible with his promise that he would "reveal all in due time."

"I'd give tut-ten dollars to know what he's up to," said Springer.

"So'd I—if I had ten dollars," declared Crane.

Once Phil and Sile attempted to follow Piper with the canoe, but when he detected them he promptly turned about and rowed straight back to Pleasant Point.

"Think yeou're smart, don't ye?" sneered

Crane, when he and Phil had also returned. "Yeou make me sick at the stomach."

"It's plain," retorted Piper grimly, "that you need another lesson to cure you of your overweening curiosity."

After that they ceased their efforts, Sile and Phil treating Piper with the utmost disdain, although Grant appeared to be more or less amused; and, in his quiet way, Stone accepted it all as an entertaining joke.

One day the boys saw Piper come swiftly forth from the tent and make for his boat, bearing the shotgun. Immediately Sile shouted:

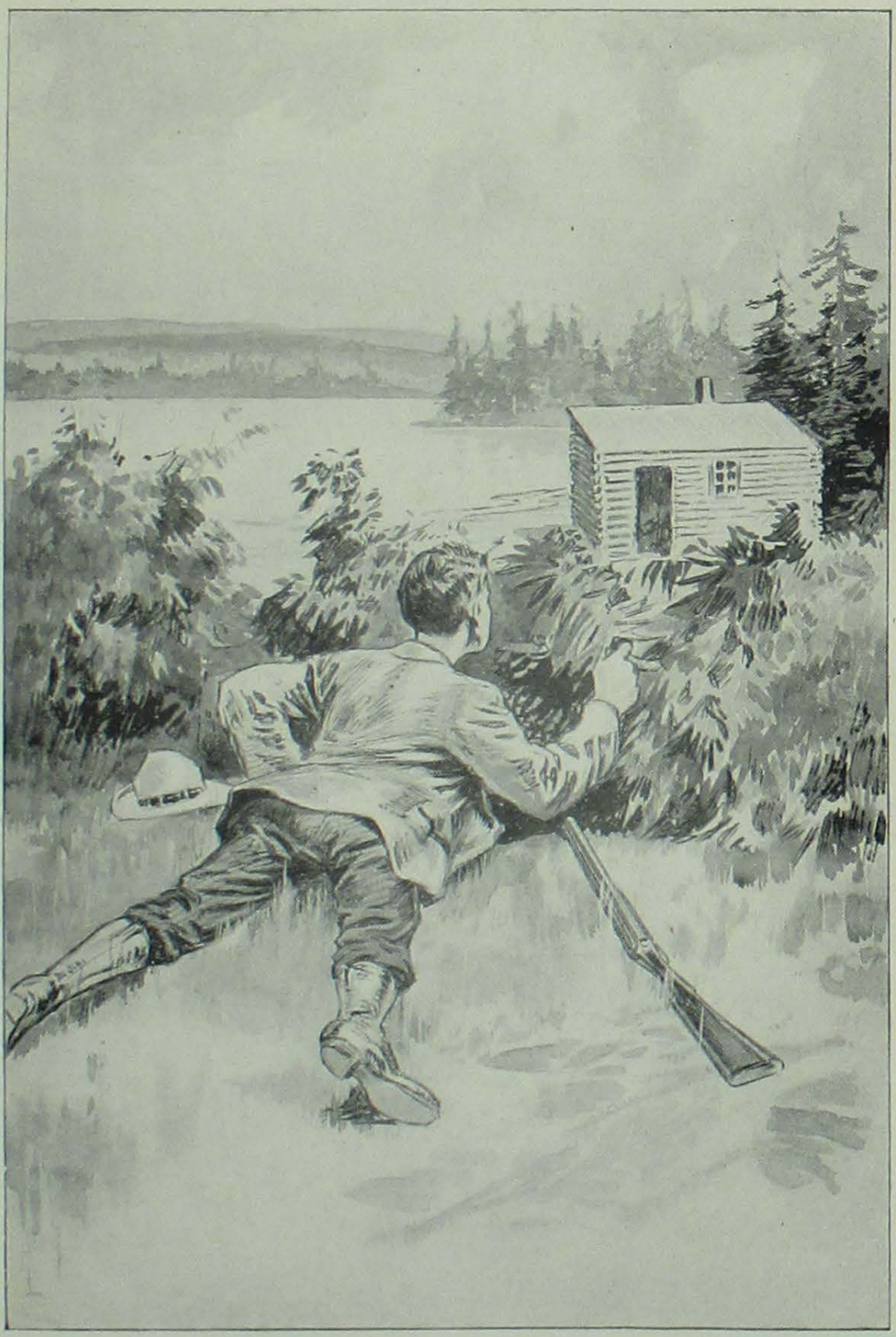
"Hey, there! Yeou leave that gun! Yeou've got a crust, takin' it without askin' leave. Drop it!"

But Sleuth hurried on, placed the gun in the boat and pushed off, paying not the slightest heed to Crane's commands. They watched him rowing steadily away across the lake, heading somewhat to the south of Spirit Island, and finally he passed from view beyond a wooded point of the farther shore.

Keeping close to the shore after rounding the

point, Sleuth plied his oars in a gentle way, as if trying to make as little noise as possible. Presently he ran into the narrow mouth of a sluggish, boggy brook and made a landing amid some overhanging bushes, where were to be seen marks which seemed to indicate that this was not the first time a boat had touched there. Stepping ashore, he pulled the little boat up until it was well hidden by the bushes, after which he took the gun and turned away. His manner, as he stole cautiously through the woods with the gun in his hands, was that of one bent upon a stealthy and dangerous manœuvre. No scout or trapper of colonial days had ever attempted to preserve more caution in a region possibly infested by redskins.

For something like a quarter of a mile the boy made his way through the thickets, maintaining that air of extreme caution. Indeed, if possible, he became even more careful, and finally he took to creeping forward on all fours, ending with a snake-like squirm flat upon his stomach, which brought him to a thick cluster of bushes on the edge of a small clearing near the lake shore.



PARTING THE BUSHES GENTLY, HE THRUST HIS HEAD INTO THEM AND LOOKED FORTH INTO THE CLEARING.

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Parting the bushes gently, he thrust his head into them and looked forth through a filmy veil of ferns into the clearing.

Near the shore, where there was a landing place, lay an overturned canoe, and from the landing a path ran up to the open door of a small log cabin. That there was someone within the cabin this open door seemed to denote, but from his place of concealment Piper could perceive no person. Nevertheless, with amazing patience, Sleuth remained hidden there, watchig and waiting, his chin upon his hands and the shotgun beside him. Nearly an hour had passed in this manner when from the cabin there came a spasmodic clicking sound, which caused the concealed youth to breathe a sigh of satisfaction.

"He's there," whispered Sleuth to himself. "I knew he must be, for the door is open and the canoe is in sight. He's hammering at his old typewriter. It's about time he did something else."

But it seemed that Sleuth waited in vain for Charles Granger to do anything else. The dozy afternoon hours crept on. At times the sound of

the typewriter would cease, only to be heard after an interval. A kingfisher, swooping along the shore, uttered a shriek and went careening away with a burst of mocking laughter. A chipmunk, scurrying through the underbrush, stopped suddenly within three feet of Piper and challenged him with a sharp chatter. The lad remaining motionless, the little ground squirrel seemed both perplexed and offended, for he continued to squeak and chitter and flit his tail in a desperate effort to make the silent figure stir. Wearying of this at last, Sleuth turned his head a bit and gave a sharp hiss, whereupon, with a scream of delighted dismay, the squirrel fled.

The afternoon was passing. In spite of himself, Piper's eyelids drooped. Suddenly they snapped wide open, and there before him in the doorway, leaning indolently against the casing and smoking a corncob pipe, was Mr. Granger, minus coat, vest and hat, and wearing an old pair of slippers upon his feet. For nearly ten minutes he lounged there, gazing dreamily toward the landing, and then he turned back into the cabin and disappeared.

"Piffle!" whispered Sleuth. "He's not going out. Another day wasted, but I'll foil him yet."

He was about to retreat when a faint, far-away sound caused him to prick up his ears and remain concealed in the bushes. Someone was whistling in the distant woods, and gradually the sound drew nearer. It was a rollicking jumble of popular tunes, and after a time the whistler, a boy about Sleuth's age—possibly a little younger—came out by a path that led away from the cabin. Straight to the door the boy advanced, and there he was met by Granger, who, like Piper, had heard the whistling.

"Here's something for you, Mr. Granger," said the strange boy as he drew a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it over to the man.

"Thanks, Jack," said Granger. "How is everything?"

"First-rate," was the cheerful reply. "I've got to hustle back. So long."

He was off as quickly as he had come, again making the woods ring with his whistling.

With the sealed envelope in his hand, Granger retired into the cabin.

"Piffle!" said Sleuth once more. "A returned manuscript, I suppose. I guess this story writing *is* poor business, all right. No use for me to watch any more today; I'm baffled again."

Withdrawing from the bushes, he crept away until he could rise to his feet and retreat fully hidden in the thickets. He seemed to be not a little disappointed and downcast, and while returning to the boat he failed to maintain the caution that had marked his movements at an earlier hour.

Putting the gun back into the boat, he pushed off and was soon out upon the lake. The sun was just touching the crest of the mountains, but its full light still fell upon the dark, pine-covered body of Spirit Island. Involuntarily Piper rowed toward the island.

"I'd just like to land there alone and look it over again," he muttered. "Springer thinks I wouldn't dare. Huh! I've got a loaded gun, and I'd like to see a ghost that could make me run now. By smoke! I've half a mind to do it!"

This temptation persisted even when he had rowed close to the island, for all of the fact that

he could again feel more than a touch of the awesome, scarey sensation that he had experienced during his previous visit to that haunted spot.

"I'll do it!" he suddenly decided, choking down the unmanning fears with a strong hand. "I'll just land and look around a few minutes before it gets dark."

Selecting a landing place on the eastern shore of the island, he beached the boat and drew it up safely. Then, with the gun in his hands and a quiver in his veins, he sought for the path that led to the hermit's hut.

Despite the fact that the sun had not yet set, that path was amazingly gloomy and dark. Piper's hands gripped the gun almost fiercely as, with parted lips, he followed the path.

Again he took note of the seeming utter absence of life and movement upon the island, and several times he paused to listen and to peer into the shadows on either side.

At last, however, he reached the clearing and saw the old hut standing lurch-wise beneath the taller pines. And now the sunlight just touched the tops of those pines, telling that the sun was

dropping behind the mountains. Twilight would follow in a few moments, and then darkness would gather over Spirit Island.

Piper sprang the catch of the hammerless, set his teeth and advanced, his finger on the trigger. Up to the very door of the hut he went, halting there with one ear half turned and listening, although he kept his slantwise gaze fixed on the dim interior. He could hear it again, faint, muffled, yet regular and distinct enough—the ticking of the unseen clock!

He had even thought of stepping, alone, inside that hut, but his resolution had been drawn upon to the limit, and he found it impossible to carry out the design. The shadows seemed to be thickening with amazing swiftness, and, shaken by the sudden dreadful thought of night upon that awesome island, Sleuth beat a precipitate retreat.

"What's the use?" he whispered huskily, as he retrod the path. "I can't find out anything this way, and I've done more than any other fellow of our bunch has dared to do. If I tell them, they'll think I'm lying."

The sun was gone when he reached the shore,

and, arriving at the spot where he had left his boat, he made the disconcerting discovery that that likewise was gone. In the sand he could see the marks he had made when he drew the boat up, but, to his horror, it was not there, nor could it be seen afloat anywhere upon the lake.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PIPER MEETS THE GHOST.

Trembling violently, Piper looked in vain for the missing boat. For a moment or two he thought it possible he had made a mistake, and that this was not the place where he had landed; but further investigation convinced him against his will that the boat had been left there. The cause of its disappearance he could not understand, and for the time being he was too excited to reason about it. Had he been calmer, he might have become convinced that it had not drifted away of its own accord.

Twilight was enfolding the eastern shore of the lake, and, gazing yearningly in that direction, Sleuth saw the gleam of a light, which he felt certain came from the campfire on Pleasant Point. Doubtless his companions were there, all unaware of his frightful predicament, and even if he were to shout they might not respond. Hearing wild

cries coming faintly across the lake, was it not possible, nay probable, that they would consider it in the nature of another "manifestation" from the haunted island? And should he fire his gun, would that bring them? At once he remembered, with a sensation of reprehension over his own neglect, that he had failed to take a supply of loaded cartridges, the two in the gun being the only ones in his possession. Were he to discharge them, he would be left practically unarmed upon the island.

"I can't do that," he whispered tremulously. "I can't fire even one shot, for, if I should have to shoot at anything with the other barrel and I missed, I'd be in a dreadful fix. Oh, what's become of that boat? What a fool I was to land here alone!"

In a feverish, unreasoning way he began hurrying pantingly along the shore, looking for the boat. This was a silly thing to do, but in a time of great excitement or distraction he is a remarkably self-possessed person who does not lose his head and do something foolish.

In order to follow the shore line of the island,

Piper was compelled, at one spot where a low bluff rose directly from the water's edge, to enter the border of the stunted pines which crowded close to the very brink of the bluff. He hesitated for a moment and drew back, shuddering; but almost immediately, holding the gun ready for use, he went forward, crouching low beneath the thick trees.

A sigh of relief was on his lips, and he was about to step forth again upon the open beach when, with a sudden tremendous jerk of every nerve in his body, he stopped. Barely more than thirty feet away he beheld a canoe that was raising scarcely a ripple on the lake as it glided slowly and silently toward the island. And it was not at all remarkable that the sight of the occupants of that canoe should mightily startle the boy who crouched in the pines.

In the prow of the canoe, apparently waiting to spring ashore, stood a huge, shaggy, gray dog. A man wielded the paddle—a man whose face was almost hidden by a long white beard, and whose garments, from the hat upon his head to the shoes he wore, were in color snowy white.

In that moment it must have seemed to Piper that he surely beheld the ghosts of Old Lonely and his faithful dog.

Gently the canoe touched the gravelly beach, the dog leaping out at once. The man followed and turned to grasp a thwart, with the evident intention of pulling the canoe up.

A twig snapped beneath Piper's feet as he stepped out of the pines and straightened up, the gun lifted to his shoulder and levelled, although it trembled and wavered in his grasp. Both man and dog heard that faint snapping sound. The former whirled quickly, while the latter bristled and growled.

"Stand still!" cried Sleuth chokingly. "Stand where you are, or I'll shoot! Keep your dog off, if you don't want him riddled!"

Growling, with its teeth exposed, the dog seemed ready to spring at the boy, but instantly the creature's master spoke.

"Here, Bob," he said sharply. "Steady, sir! Down! down!"

The creature obeying its master's commands, Sleuth felt his courage rise with a sudden bound,

although his tremendous excitement was not in the least abated. With an air of perplexed dismay the man remained standing at the water's edge, his eyes fastened on the threatening figure of the boy. In that manner they gazed at each other for a few moments of intense, nerve-tingling silence. Presently the man spoke.

"Put down that gun," he said. "If it's loaded, you're liable to make a mistake and shoot me."

Exultantly Piper retorted:

"If you're a ghost, it won't hurt you to be shot; and if you're not a ghost, you'd better explain your actions mighty quick."

"Put down the gun," repeated the man angrily. "I'm no ghost."

"Ah!" breathed Sleuth in tremendous satisfaction; and he lowered the gun.

"What are you doing here?" questioned the person in white.

"Perhaps I was looking for you," was the answer.

Beneath his breath the man muttered a word or two, smothered, but expressive of great annoyance and anger. The dog whined question-

ingly. Master of the situation, Piper waited, all the chill having gone from his body.

"I suspected you, you young rascal—I suspected you when you came prowling around my cabin," said the man. "You were rather clever with your excuses and your pretence of great interest in my literary work, but I couldn't help feeling that you had a hidden design."

"Your premonition was correct, Mr. Granger," said Sleuth. "Your glibness, when you visited us at Pleasant Point, in spinning the romantic story of Lovers' Leap and the fantastic tale of the haunted island aroused my suspicions. You told those yarns altogether too well. That's a beautiful Santa Claus set of whiskers you're wearing."

The man stroked his beard and laughed shortly, in spite of himself.

"Up to date they have served my purpose very well," he returned; "but henceforth, as your remarkable cleverness has led you to catch on to the little game, I suppose I'll have little use for them."

"Your dog," declared the triumphant boy, "was a dead give-away. You must have kept

him tied up the most of the time, but when I saw him and noted his color, on the occasion of my friendly call upon you, I decided instantly that he would appear very well as a spook dog if seen in the darkness or through the twilight of evening. I've watched you every day since then, waiting for you to come here. At last my vigilance has been fully rewarded."

"Well, now," said Mr. Granger, for the man in white was indeed the somewhat seclusive young author, "you might come down here and give me a hand with the canoe. It's light, and I can pull it up alone, as I have many times, but I'm not adverse to your assistance."

"The dog——"

"He won't touch you. He's the most harmless creature in the world."

Piper descended at once, and together the man and boy lifted the light canoe, bore it across the narrow strip of beach and slid it into the shelter of some bushes, where it was entirely hidden from sight.

"Now," said Granger, "if you wish a little amusement, I'll show you how easy it is to make

intelligent people believe in ghosts. It's about time for a party from the hotel to come off in a boat with the keen desire of beholding the spirits of Old Lonely and his dog. They will approach the western side of the island. Come on."

His nerves no longer quivering, Piper followed the man and the dog, chuckling to himself. All his fears of the black and gloomy pines had been dispelled, and it was with real difficulty that he kept from dancing and shouting. What would his friends say when he told them? He swelled tremendously with pride and self-importance as he pictured the manner in which he would unfold to them the story of his amazing discernment and sagacity. Surely, it would be an hour of triumph.

By the easiest available course Granger led the way to the western side of the island, pausing well within the shelter of the trees, yet selecting a place where he could command a view of the open lake in the immediate vicinity. The lights of the hotel shone brightly at the base of Lovers' Leap. A gentle purple dusk was thickening upon the face of the water.

"They ought to appear within ten minutes,"

said Granger in a low tone. "I want you to keep out of sight all the time, and I hope you'll promise not to let them know by word or sign that you are here."

"Go ahead," said Sleuth. "I won't expose you to them, and I'm really eager to watch the sport. But how do you know anyone is coming?"

"I received a message from the hotel, telling me that some of the guests would come out to-night to look for Old Lonely's spirit. One of the bell hops brought me the message."

"Oh, yes," giggled Sleuth; "I saw him. I was watching your sylvan retreat when he brought that message, but I thought it was one of your stories returned from a publisher."

"You've certainly put yourself to a lot of trouble," muttered Granger. "As a doubting Thomas or Billy, you're the real thing."

In a few moments they heard the distant sound of oars and the low murmur of voices, and it was not long before, in the midst of the gloom, they beheld a dark object slowly drawing near, and knew it was the boat from the hotel.

"Now," said Granger softly, "keep perfectly still and watch me materialize."

He waited until the boat seemed to pause some rods from the shore. It contained a number of persons, whose words could be distinctly heard. One man was laughing in a boasting way as he told the others that it was all a ridiculous piece of folly, but a nervous, excited woman was begging him to keep still.

Crouching, Granger put his hand on the dog, whispering a command:

"Sing, Bob—sing."

Immediately the animal lifted its muzzle and gave vent to the most doleful howling imaginable. Within four feet of the creature, Piper felt a momentary symptom of the emotion that had possessed him on the occasion when his ears were first greeted by that awesome sound.

From the boat there came sudden little exclamations and screams, both masculine and feminine.

"I told you!" one of the ladies was heard repeating triumphantly. "I've heard it before. Now watch; you'll see something more."

"Good boy, Bob," whispered Granger, rising. "Easy, sir. Come."

Very deliberately and very slowly he stepped forth from the darkness of the pines. In truth, he moved so slowly that at a distance, seen through the darkness, it might have seemed that he simply appeared, without taking any steps at all. Imitating his master, the dog likewise advanced until both stood out in view, with the dark trees as a background.

Still more excited exclamations rose from the party in the boat.

"There he is—there's Old Lonely's ghost!" palpitated the lady's voice. "There's his dog, too! See! see!"

"Let's get nearer. Let's land," suggested a man. But, somehow, there was a false note in his words, which seemed to betray that he was not as eager to put his feet on the island as he wished the others to think him.

"I wouldn't do it for all the money in the world," declared the lady. "We're near enough. Don't move another inch toward that island."

For thirty seconds, perhaps, Granger stood

quite still; and then, stepping backward, he retreated as slowly, silently and deliberately as he had advanced; and in this manner he must have made it seem to the occupants of the boat that he actually faded and vanished from their view like a wraith. The dog also retreated slowly, although it turned about to do so.

"Great work," chuckled Piper, as Granger crouched beside him. "But what if they do land?"

"They won't," was the whispered assurance. "They'll go away directly."

He was right. After lingering a few minutes, as if desiring again to see the "ghost," the party in the boat rowed away, their oars clanking in the locks.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECRET.

"I wish you'd tell me one or two things that I don't quite understand, Mr. Granger," said Sleuth, as they retraced their steps through the woods. "For instance, there's the mysterious ticking of the unseen clock in the hermit's hut."

Granger chuckled a bit. "I've got a clock hidden there," he said. "I took pains to hide it well, too."

"Very clever," said Sleuth. "But how about the mysterious rappings?"

"You observed that the old hut has fallen over until it touches one of those tall pines. When the wind blows, I fancy two of the limbs of that tree must knock together, and the sound, communicated along the trunk of the tree, is like that made by someone knocking."

"Um," said Piper; "simple. But when we were in the old ranch the day of the thunder-shower,

we heard a low moaning following those knocking sounds."

"I have heard that likewise when there was enough wind to move the door of the hut on its rusty hinges. It's really a shame that you should catch me at this job, my boy, for it's liable to deprive me of a steady remuneration, and my story writing scarcely provides a satisfactory income."

"The hotel people have been paying you," declared Piper. "That's it, eh?"

"Sure. As I told you boys when I visited your camp, this hotel, being located some distance from a convenient railway station, didn't succeed very well at first. Its methods of advertising were strictly conventional, and it was I who suggested something better in that line. Having heard the fable of Lovers' Leap and the story of Old Lonely, I placed before the hotel proprietors a scheme through which I felt confident their place could be made very popular and attractive. It was I who advised them to place the white cross upon the cliff, and I wrote for them the story of the Indian lovers, which they are now using in their printed advertising. I urged them furthermore

to make the most of the superstitious belief of some people that this island was haunted, and I agreed to do a few ghost stunts. You can see how easy it was for me, in collaboration with the hotel people, to carry this thing through. Two of the men from the hotel boathouse were rowing that boat, and, had the others insisted on landing upon the island, they would have pretended they were too frightened to do so. But it's all over now. My lucrative profession as a spook is busted."

"Now, really, that's too bad," said Sleuth, feeling sorry for the man. "If I don't tell——"

"But you will. You can't keep it to yourself. I never saw a boy who could keep such a secret."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Sleuth resentfully. "Perhaps, Mr. Granger, you haven't got boys thoroughly sized up. There may be some who can't keep their traps closed, but I want you to understand that I'm different."

The man stopped and grasped Piper by the shoulder.

"Will you promise not to expose me—at least, not for a year?" he asked eagerly. "That would

give me time enough. Another season at this ghost game ought to pack that hotel full, and I can get a regular monthly salary to do my part of the work."

"I've always wanted to write stories," said Sleuth shrewdly. "You seem to know something about that sort of business, and if you'll put me wise to the game I'll remain as dumb as an oyster about this spook trick."

"You won't tell your friends even?"

"Not a living soul," vowed Piper.

"Well, I'm not sure that I can instruct you in the art of writing stories; I've a lot to learn myself. Nevertheless, I'll do my best. If you have some natural ability in that line, it may be possible that you can write, but I can't promise you any degree of success without knowing more of your talents."

"It's a bargain, Mr. Granger," said Piper, putting out his hand in the darkness. "If you'll do that, I'll keep mum for a year or more, in case you ask it."

They shook hands, sealing the pledge.

They had reached the canoe and were about to launch it when distant voices were heard calling:

"Sleuth—oh, Sleuth! Piper! Where are you?"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered the boy. "That's some of my bunch. They're over yonder somewhere. Confound their hides! Now I know who took my boat. Now I understand how I happened to be left here on this old island."

The boys were still calling.

"You'd better answer them," said Granger quickly. "Go to meet them. I'll keep out of sight. Good by."

"Good by, Mr. Granger. I'll see you to-morrow about two o'clock at your cabin, if that's agreeable."

"That's agreeable to me. Hustle now. Answer them quick."

Piper hurried away, shouting a response to his friends, and when he reached the place where he had left his boat he saw them a short distance away upon the water. There were three of them. Two were in the canoe, while one occupied the boat Sleuth had hired.

"Well, it's about time you fellows came back

for me," rasped Piper. "Thought you were playing a fine old game, didn't you? You were having a lot of fun with me, weren't you? Rather clever to sneak up and take my boat away, wasn't it?"

"Gee!" said Springer, who was sitting in the boat. "Old Sleuthy is mighty hot under the cuc-collar."

"Yes," sneered Crane from the canoe; "I'll bate he's pretty nigh scat to death."

"Oh, you will, will you?" scoffed Piper. "Well, don't bet too much on it, for you'll lose your money. You haven't got nerve enough to come here even with somebody, but I've been all over the island alone."

"Go ashore and take him off in the boat, Springer," directed Grant. "He sure doesn't seem very much frightened."

Piper got into the boat as soon as Phil brought it to the shore.

Just because you fellows are scarecrows yourselves," he sneered, "you mustn't get the idea that everyone else is a coward. Come on now, Springer, you can do the rowing as long as you have

the oars. Let's get to camp. I'm hungry for supper."

"Sus-seen anything of the ghost?" asked Phil, with a laugh.

"Oh, piffle!" retorted Sleuth. "Ghosts don't frighten me. Why, I'd be willing to stay alone all night on this island."

"Yes, you would!" scoffed Springer, although he wondered that Sleuth betrayed no symptoms of perturbation other than those caused by resentment at the trick they had perpetrated upon him. "We've been waiting for you to holler. We took the boat and went round the little point yonder, where we'd be out of sight, and waited there."

"Say," called Crane from the canoe, "we heard a dog howlin,' and it seemed to be on the island, too. Did yeou hear it, Sleuth?"

"Sure," was the careless answer; "I heard it. It was on the island, all right."

"Pipe," said Grant, "you're really a wonder. I confess that I've never had you sized up just right. For pure, unadulterated nerve, you seem to have the rest of up roped and thrown."

Sleuth's chest expanded tremendously.

"You never can tell," he retorted.

They were some distance from the island, making for the camp, in the vicinity of which the fire, tended by Stone, could be seen gleaming cheerfully, when suddenly, behind them, rose the long drawn howling of a dog, hearing which, Springer jerked nervously at the oars and put greater energy into his stroke.

"There it is!" he cried. "Great Scott! it mum-makes my blood run cuc-cold!"

"Your blood," scoffed Sleuth—"your blood is about as thick as water."

"Look!" said Phil.

They looked back. In the border of the pines a light like a gleaming eye winked at them several times and vanished. Piper was the only one who knew that it must be a strong electric torch with a reflector, operated by Mr. Charles Granger.

Sleuth kept his word to Granger; not even a hint of the real solution of the mystery did he breathe to his campmates. They wondered at his

surprising courage, for, accepting their challenge to do so, he permitted them to place him on the island and leave him there alone late one afternoon, and there he remained until they came to take him off an hour before midnight.

"Spooks," said Piper, "are really sociable and friendly when you come to know them well. You never heard of one of them actually hurting a live person. As far as Old Lonely was concerned, I think he must have been a pretty decent sort when he was alive, even though he was tempted to rob a bank, and I haven't the slightest notion that he'd harm anyone now he's dead."

Every afternoon during the remainder of the outing Piper visited Mr. Granger at the latter's cabin. He explained to his friends that the young author was teaching him to write stories, and their newly acquired respect for Sleuth's courage prevented them from joshing him much about this. Indeed, he was permitted to do practically as he pleased around the camp, taking advantage of which, he allowed his companions to perform all the labor, while he lounged around and dreamed of the day when he would write a detective

yarn that should make the fascinating tales of "Old Sleuth" seem tame and feeble by comparison.

Twice Granger came to the boys' camp and spent a sociable hour with them. He and Piper seemed to be on the most friendly terms, and once they were detected laughing slyly over a joke that was not explained at that time to the rest of the boys.

Jim Simpson also came frequently with supplies from the farm, and sometimes he talked with Grant about cowboy life, for he still clung to the hope that he would follow such a career when he became his own master.

Peace was formally declared between Sile Crane and Carl Duckelstein, and more than once the Dutch boy fished unmolested from the point.

At last the end of the outing came, as the end to all pleasant things must come, and the boys pulled down their tent, packed up, and their outfit was transported to Pemstock by Carl. Ere leaving the camping ground, they paused to give a rousing cheer. And as they marched away

Springer cast a regretful look over his shoulder in the direction of Spirit Island.

"Too bad," he said. "You've got plenty of nerve, Sleuth, but it's too bad you couldn't solve the mystery of that old island."

Piper simply smiled.

These experiences, of course, only increased Piper's interest in solving mysteries and his belief in his own genius in that line. During the fall immediately following his adventures in the summer camp, the Sleuth scented a secret nearer home. With his usual caution he followed the scent and made deductions, and the results surprised even him. The story is all told in "The Great Oakdale Mystery," the fifth volume of the Oakdale Academy Series.

THE END.